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**Bakhtinian-Miévillian Festivity: Ab-Carnivalism and Xenosomatic Degradation
in the Speculative Fiction of China Miéville**

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Abstract

This thesis examines how the speculative fiction of China Miéville registers modified variants of two concepts posited by Mikhail Bakhtin: carnival and grotesque realism. Belonging to folk culture, carnival is a licensed suspension of established socio-hierarchical structure and the norms, values and laws associated with it. Grotesque realism is a literary mode in which images of the human body eating, drinking, defecating and copulating—that is, images of ‘the material bodily principle’—reflect the ethos of carnivalistic folk culture via degradation: an act of destruction–regeneration. This thesis fills a Bakhtinian-Miévillean lacuna in scholarship by demonstrating how Miéville’s speculative fiction contains modified versions of Bakhtinian carnival and grotesque realism: ab-carnivalism and xenosomatic degradation, respectively. Ab-carnivalism is an occasion in Miéville’s speculative fiction when commonfolk or slaves resist authority figures via unlicensed modes of phenomena that Bakhtin assigns to carnival. Ab-carnivalism is variously a species of activism or radical politics, functioning as a hyper-transgressive and spatiotemporally flexible alternative to Bakhtinian carnival. Xenosomatic degradation transpires in Miéville’s speculative fiction when humanoid or inhuman bodies affect the sensuous or abstract world by exercising grotesque realism’s carnivalistic destruction–regeneration. Chapter One is dedicated to a critique of ab-carnivalism in six Miéville fictions: *Perdido Street Station*, *The Scar*, *Iron Council*, *Kraken*, ‘‘Tis the Season’ (2004) and *Un Lun Dun*. It demonstrates that ab-carnivalism can accommodate flexible methods of mobilisation against oppressive authority figures and, by doing so, inspire radical change. Chapter Two examines the interrelation between ab-carnivalism and renegopoleis, or renegade cities, in *Iron Council*. It lays bare how both the Iron Council and the New Crobuzon Collective possess renegopolitan cultures that spring from, and are moulded by, ab-carnivalism. Chapter Three discusses how an interplay between Bakhtin’s notion of heteroglossia and carnivalism of the Bakhtinian and ab- variety disrupts the familiar, putatively inflexible mechanisms of the alien language featured in *Embassytown*. Chapter Four analyses xenosomatic degradation in a selection of Miéville fictions: four novels (*King Rat*, *Perdido Street Station*, *Embassytown* and *The Scar*), one novella (*The Last Days of New Paris*) and three short stories (‘Säcken’, ‘Jack’ and ‘The Familiar’). It exemplifies how xenosomatic degradation’s carnivalistic destruction–regeneration mechanism enables its users to reconfigure their lives, worlds or both. At its core, this thesis serves to unveil how Miéville’s speculative fiction radicalises the conceptual frameworks that Bakhtin attributes to carnival and grotesque realism.

Contents

Introduction: The Carnivalisation of China Miéville’s Speculative Fiction.....	1
1. Bakhtinian Carnival and Ab-Carnivalism	2
2. Grotesque Realism and Xenosomatic Degradation	14
3. The Novelty of This Thesis	18
4. The Structure of This Thesis	23
Chapter One: Ab-Carnivalism across Miéville’s Fictional Universe	25
1. Insurrectionist Puppet Theatre.....	25
2. A Human–Xenian Intervention	29
3. Familiarity Breeds Contempt.....	32
4. Toward a Deprivatisation of Christmas.....	35
5. The Virtues of Polysemy: Recalcitrant Words	43
6. A Maritime Affair: Piratical Discord	47
7. Hexadic Revelations.....	55
Chapter Two: Renegopolitan Ab-Carnivalism in <i>Iron Council</i>	58
1. ‘Welcome to the Free Territories’: The New Crobuzon Collective.....	59
2. Humble Beginnings: A Prelude to the Iron Council.....	69
3. The Dawn of the Iron Council	76
4. Homeward Bound.....	87

5. Two Tales of Renegopolitan Ab-Carnivalism	93
Chapter Three: An Enchiridion to Linguistic Conflict: Heteroglossic Bearings on Bakhtinian Carnivalism and Ab-Carnivalism in <i>Embassytown</i>.....	96
1. A War of Words: Centripetalism and Centrifugalism	98
2. Performative Mendacity	100
3. Orateehood	104
4. God-Drug Redux: Revolutionary Semiosis.....	111
5. A Linguistic Tapestry	120
Chapter Four: Xenosomatic Degradation.....	122
1. The Depths of the Stomach	122
2. Aesthetics and Nightmares	130
3. Emancipatory Fucking	140
4. Mutilation	143
5. Bas-Lagian Remakings.....	147
6. Untrammelled Proteanism	154
7. Xenosomatic Degradation across Space and Time.....	160
Conclusion	162
1. Fragments of a Totality	162
2. Venturing Beyond Miéville	166
3. Assertions of Finality.....	170

Bibliography	172
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List of Abbreviations

Abbreviations of Fictions

E: China Miéville, *Embassytown* (London: Macmillan, 2011)

‘F’: China Miéville, ‘Familiar’, in *Looking for Jake and Other Stories* (London: Macmillan, 2005), pp. 81–96

IC: China Miéville, *Iron Council* (London: Macmillan, 2004)

‘J’: China Miéville, ‘Jack’, in *Looking for Jake and Other Stories* (London: Pan Books, 2006), pp. 201–212

KR: China Miéville, *King Rat* (London: Macmillan, 1998)

K: China Miéville, *Kraken* (London: Macmillan, 2010)

PSS: China Miéville, *Perdido Street Station* (London: Pan Books, 2011)

‘S’: China Miéville, ‘Säcken’, in *Three Moments of an Explosion: Stories* (London: Macmillan, 2015), pp. 142–172

LDNP: China Miéville, *The Last Days of New Paris* (London: Picador, 2016)

S: China Miéville, *The Scar* (London: Pan Books, 2003)

VCT: Norman Spinrad, *The Void Captain’s Tale* (London: Panther, 1984)

‘TS’: China Miéville, ‘‘Tis the Season’, in *Looking for Jake and Other Stories* (London: Pan Books, 2006), pp. 185–197

ULD: China Miéville, *Un Lun Dun* (London: Macmillan, 2007)

Abbreviations of Scholarly Works

‘DN’: M. M. Bakhtin, ‘Discourse in the Novel’, in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. by Michael Holquist, trans. by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1981), pp. 259–422

FS: Michel Foucault, *Fearless Speech*, ed. by Joseph Pearson (Los Angeles, CA: Semiotext(e), 2001)

OFS: J. R. R. Tolkien, ‘On Fairy-Stories’, in *Tolkien on Fairy-Stories*, ed. by Verlyn Flieger and Douglas A. Anderson (London: HarperCollins, 2014), pp. 27–84

PDP: Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*, ed. and trans. by Caryl Emerson (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1984)

RW: Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. by Helene Iswolsky (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1984)

Introduction: The Carnivalisation of China Miéville's Speculative Fiction

In *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (1929), Mikhail Bakhtin asserts that '[c]arnival has worked out an entire language of symbolic concretely sensuous forms' through which 'a unified (but complex) carnival sense of the world'¹ finds expression. The language at issue frustrates a comprehensive or sufficient translation into a verbal counterpart, yet it can, Bakhtin argues, 'be transposed into the language of literature' (*PDP*, p. 122). Bakhtin calls this transposition 'the carnivalization of literature' (*PDP*, p. 122), observing that it brings forth 'the carnivalesque'. As the *Oxford English Dictionary* puts it, the Bakhtinian carnivalesque encompasses things 'relating to or designating a literary or artistic outlook, style, or genre characterized by anti-authoritarianism, the destabilization of social hierarchies, chaos, humour, and the breaking of social conventions and taboos'.²

In an interview with Joan Gordon, China Miéville posits a correlation between the Bakhtinian carnivalesque and genres rooted in impossibility:

for me genre—sf [science fiction] and fantasy and horror—is [...] about the positing of something impossible—whether not-yet-possible or never-possible—and then taking that impossibility and granting it its own terms and systematicity. It's carnivalesque in its impossibility and overturning of reality, but it's rationalist in that it pretends it is real. [...] [I]t's the surrendering to the impossible, the weird, that characterizes genre. Those flirting with sf don't surrender to it; [...] [t]hey are embarrassed and confused by the weird, and so they have neither the Bakhtinian side nor the Newtonian—neither the carnival nor the internal rigor.³

Miéville's contention reflects Bakhtinian carnival's indispensability to producing science fiction (SF), fantasy, horror and, while he does not say so himself, their manifold cognates.

At the core of this thesis is an attempt to expound the peculiar relationship between Miéville's speculative fiction and Bakhtinian carnival. Speculative fiction is here understood

¹ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, ed. and trans. by Caryl Emerson (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), p. 122. Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text.

² 'Carnivalesque, Adj. & N.', in *Oxford English Dictionary* <<https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/2712331795>> [accessed 13 October 2025].

³ Joan Gordon, 'Reveling in Genre: An Interview with China Miéville', *Science Fiction Studies*, 30 (2003), 355–373 (p. 366).

as ‘a fuzzy set’ whose parameters fundamentally conform to those put forward by Marek Oziewicz:

First applied to genre studies by Brian Attebery, a fuzzy set is a category defined not by clear boundaries but by resemblance to prototypical examples and degrees of membership: from being *exactly like* to being *somewhat* or *marginally like*. Likewise, speculative fiction in its most recent understanding is a fuzzy set super category that houses all non-mimetic genres—genres that in one way or another depart from imitating consensus reality—from fantasy, science fiction, and horror to their derivatives, hybrids, and cognate genres.⁴

This thesis’s contention is twofold: i) Miéville’s speculative fiction is informed by two carnivalistic tropes—that is, ‘ab-carnivalism’ and ‘xenosomatic degradation’; and ii) both derive from, and broaden the possibilities of, the conceptual frameworks that Bakhtin ascribes to carnival and the carnivalistic literary mode ‘grotesque realism’. This thesis, in other words, argues that ab-carnivalism and xenosomatic degradation render Miéville’s speculative fictions atypical specimens of carnivalised literature.

In what follows, I will define the thesis’s formative concepts: Bakhtinian carnival, ab-carnivalism, grotesque realism and xenosomatic degradation.

1. Bakhtinian Carnival and Ab-Carnivalism

Occurring from the 1960s to the 1980s, Bakhtin’s initial introduction to the West is traceable to the respective writings of Julia Kristeva and Tvetzan Todorov, both of whom positioned him as a harbinger of structuralism.⁵ Bakhtin, a Russian, evolved his formulations of culture, language and literature independently from the official Soviet scholarship to which he stood in opposition.⁶ Both within and without his homeland, Bakhtin has hence often been regarded

⁴ Marek Oziewicz, ‘Speculative Fiction’, in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Literature*, emphasis in original <Speculative Fiction | Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Literature> [accessed 2 June 2025]. The ‘fuzzy set’ model’s capacity to serve as a means of categorising genre was first advanced by Attebery in *Strategies of Fantasy* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1992), pp. 12–13.

⁵ Liisa Steinby and Tintti Klapuri, ‘Introduction: The Acting Subject of Bakhtin’, in *Bakhtin and his Others: (Inter)subjectivity, Chronotope, Dialogism*, ed. by Liisa Steinby and Tintti Klapuri (London: Anthem Press, 2013), pp. xi–xxiv (p. xi).

⁶ Craig Brandist and Mika Lähteenmäki, ‘Early Soviet Linguistics and Mikhail Bakhtin’s Essays on the Novel of the 1930s’, in *Politics and the Theory of Language in the USSR 1917–1938: The Birth of Sociological Linguistics*, ed. by Craig Brandist and Katya Chown (London: Anthem Press, 2010), pp. 69–88 (p. 69).

as an unofficial theoretician.⁷ The concepts that sprang from Bakhtin did so according to a methodological tendency: having identified two antithetical, unacceptable facets of the world, he would postulate a concept or *modus operandi* that would reconcile them or disintegrate their conflict.⁸ Such is the origin of Bakhtinian carnival. For Bakhtin, carnival is, in other words, marked by utopian elements that hinge on a dissolution of prosaic tensions between a myriad of things.

A considerable proportion of scholars have opted to solely or predominantly describe Bakhtin's theory of carnival via his treatise *Rabelais and His World*.⁹ Nonetheless, I will principally employ *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* to delineate carnival, as it is here that Bakhtin offers his most explicit account of the phenomenon.

Carnival, writes Bakhtin, is a ritualistic vein of 'syncretic pageantry' (*PDP*, p. 122, emphasis in original) that eschews a divide between spectators and performers. Here, 'everyone is an active participant' in 'life drawn out of its *usual* rut'—that is, "life turned inside out," "the reverse side of the world" (*PDP*, p. 122, emphasis in original). Carnival, then, entails a measure of collective immersion: 'Its participants *live* in it, [...] live by its laws as long as those laws are in effect' (*PDP*, p. 122, emphasis in original). Occurring for a brief period, the affair 'celebrates [...] the very process of replaceability, and not the precise item that is replaced. Carnival is, so to speak, functional and not substantive. It absolutizes nothing, but rather proclaims the joyful relativity of everything' (*PDP*, p. 125). At its core, it is, Bakhtin argues, a doorway to 'a second world and a second life outside officialdom', as it births 'a completely different, nonofficial, extraecclesiastical and extrapolitical aspect of the world, of man, and of human relations'.¹⁰ These carnivalistic permutations of world and life enable the people to access 'a utopian realm of community, freedom, equality, and abundance' (*RW*, p. 9). Such are the advantages of carnival.

⁷ Brandist and Lähteenmäki, 'Early Soviet Linguistics and Mikhail Bakhtin's Essays on the Novel of the 1930s', p. 69.

⁸ Caryl Emerson, *The First Hundred Years of Mikhail Bakhtin* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), p. 5.

⁹ This, perhaps, is because Bakhtin first employed the term 'carnavalesque' in *Rabelais and His World*. Scholars' decision to rely on this text as a tool for defining Bakhtin's notion of carnival is often explicitly dictated by the fact that he here offers his most detailed ruminations on, and analysis of, carnival laughter.

¹⁰ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. by Helene Iswolsky (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1984), p. 6. Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text.

In *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, Bakhtin devises a carnival schema founded on four 'ritual-pageant "thoughts" [that are] experienced and played out in the form of life itself' (*PDP*, p. 123). For him, these concretised ritual-pageant thoughts, each of which 'had coalesced and survived for thousands of years among the broadest masses of European mankind' (*PDP*, p. 123), are categories of carnivalistic phenomena.

The first among them is '*free and familiar contact among people*': a corollary of carnival having 'suspended [...] hierarchical structure and all the forms of terror, reverence, piety, and etiquette connected with it—that is, everything resulting from [...] inequality among people (including age)' (*PDP*, p. 123, emphasis in original). Given this development, '[p]eople who in [quotidian] life are separated by impenetrable hierarchical barriers enter into free familiar contact on the carnival square' (*PDP*, p. 123). This Bakhtinian-carnivalistic category is 'responsible for the special way mass actions are organized, and for free carnival gesticulation, and for the outspoken carnivalistic word' (*PDP*, p. 123). Free and familiar contact—which, for the sake of brevity, I will hereafter refer to as familiarity—is the lifeblood of socialisation during carnival.

Arising from that first carnivalistic category is the second: eccentricity. 'Carnival', Bakhtin illustratively remarks, 'is the place for working out, in a concretely sensuous, half-real and half-play-acted form, a *new mode of interrelationship between individuals*, counterposed to the all-powerful socio-hierarchical relationships of noncarnival life' (*PDP*, p. 123, emphasis in original). To be more precise, carnival serves to accommodate 'behavior, gesture, and discourse [...] freed from the authority of all hierarchical positions' (*PDP*, p. 123) that shape ordinary life. This carnivalistic eccentricity, Bakhtin concludes, 'permits [...] the latent sides of human nature to reveal and express themselves' (*PDP*, p. 123).

The third carnivalistic category that Bakhtin propounds is *mésalliances*:

all things that were once self-enclosed, disunified, distanced from one another by a noncarnivalistic hierarchical worldview are drawn into carnivalistic contacts and combinations. Carnival brings together, unifies, weds, and combines the sacred with the profane, the lofty with the low, the great with the insignificant, the wise with the stupid. (*PDP*, p. 123)

To put it otherwise, carnivalistic *mésalliances* fleetingly extinguish all manner of time-hallowed dualisms that officialdom prescribes and enforces.

Profanation is the final carnivalistic category that Bakhtin identifies. It encompasses such phenomena as ‘carnivalistic blasphemies, a whole system of carnivalistic debasings and bringings down to earth, carnivalistic obscenities linked with the reproductive power of the earth and the body, carnivalistic parodies on sacred texts and sayings, etc’ (*PDP*, p. 123).

Crowning and decrowning are also fundamental to Bakhtin’s carnival schema. ‘The primary carnivalistic act’, Bakhtin posits, ‘is the *mock crowning and subsequent decrowning of the carnival king*’, because it operates as ‘a dualistic ambivalent ritual’ from which there proceeds ephemeral forms of pseudo-kings and -queens—or, as in the festival of fools, -bishops, -priests or -popes (*PDP*, p. 124, emphasis in original). The carnival king’s decrowning manifests ‘the very core of the carnival sense of the world—the *pathos of shifts and changes, of death and renewal*’ (*PDP*, p. 124, emphasis in original). Crowning–decrowning bespeaks ‘the inevitability and at the same time the creative power of the shift-and-renewal, *the joyful relativity* of all structure and order, of all authority and all (hierarchical) position’ (*PDP*, p. 124 emphasis in original). For Bakhtin, crowning initiates and sanctifies carnival’s upside-down world: ‘he who is crowned is the antipode of a real king, a slave or a jester’ (*PDP*, p. 124). The legitimate king hands his clothing and tokens of authority to his mock carnivalistic counterpart, after which ‘they become almost stage props (although these are ritual stage props); their symbolic meaning becomes two-leveled (as real symbols of power, that is in the noncarnival world, they are single-leveled, absolute, heavy, and monolithically serious) (*PDP*, pp. 124–125). In short, carnivalistic crowning–decrowning is a versatile ritualistic praxis by which Bakhtinian carnivalism effects cultural, social and political proteanism.

Another major facet of carnival, Bakhtin contends, is laughter, as ‘it deals with the very process of change, with *crisis* itself’ (*PDP*, p. 127, emphasis in original). Indeed, Bakhtin has it that ‘[c]arnivalistic laughter [...] is directed toward something higher—toward a shift of authorities and truths, a shift of world orders. [...] Combined in the act of carnival laughter are death and rebirth, negation (a smirk) and affirmation (rejoicing laughter)’ (*PDP*, p. 127).

Bakhtin's carnivalistic laughter is thus defined by an 'ambivalent' spirit through which it captures 'a whole outlook on the world' (*PDP*, p. 127).¹¹

A number of scholars have voiced scepticism regarding the extent of carnival's transgressiveness. Terry Eagleton posits that '[c]arnival [...] is a *licensed* affair in every sense, a permissible rupture of hegemony, a contained popular blow-off as disturbing and relatively ineffectual as a revolutionary work of art. As Shakespeare's Olivia remarks, there is no slander in an allowed fool'.¹² Likewise, Umberto Eco maintains that '[c]arnival can exist only as an *authorized* transgression', that it fundamentally constitutes a 'paramount [example] of law reinforcement' because it 'remind[s] us of the existence of the rule'.¹³ Roger Sales observes that the carnivals of early-nineteenth-century England and sixteenth-century France 'did not necessarily undermine authority': they could serve as 'a vehicle for social protest and the method for disciplining that protest'.¹⁴ Indeed, the authorities, Sales points out, permitted carnival to afford the commonfolk a 'release of emotions and grievances [that] made them easier to police in the long term'.¹⁵ Sales, moreover, argues that carnival '*reaffirmed the status quo*' insofar as its kings and queens were selected and crowned.¹⁶ Max Gluckman notes that although 'rites of reversal obviously include a protest against the established order', they are simultaneously 'intended to preserve and even to strengthen' it.¹⁷ The cognitive and emotional mechanisms that Victor Turner identifies in such phenomena—what he designates 'rituals of status reversal'—inspire his tantamount conclusion:

Cognitively, nothing underlines regularity so well as absurdity or paradox. Emotionally, nothing satisfies as much as extravagant or temporarily permitted illicit behavior. Rituals of status reversal accommodate both aspects. By making the low high and the high low they reaffirm the hierarchical principle.¹⁸

¹¹ Bakhtin offers a rigorous exposition of carnivalistic laughter's history, with a mind to better apprehending Rabelais's writings, in chapter one of *Rabelais and His World*.

¹² Terry Eagleton, *Walter Benjamin, or, Towards a Revolutionary Criticism* (London: New Left Books, 1981), p. 148, emphasis in original.

¹³ Umberto Eco, 'The Frames of Comic 'Freedom'', in *Carnival!*, ed. by Thomas A. Sebeok and Marcia E. Erickson (Berlin: Mouton, 1984), pp. 1–9 (p. 6, emphasis in original).

¹⁴ Roger Sales, *English Literature in History, 1780–1830: Pastoral and Politics* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2022), p. 169.

¹⁵ Sales, *English Literature in History, 1780–1830*, p. 169.

¹⁶ Sales, *English Literature in History, 1780–1830*, p. 169, emphasis in original.

¹⁷ Max Gluckman, *Custom and Conflict in Africa* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1965), p. 19.

¹⁸ Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1969), p. 176.

A decided consensus among the foregoing criticism is carnival's Janus-faced complexion—that is, its emancipation from, and augmentation of, established socio-hierarchical systems.

In both *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* and *Rabelais and His World*, Bakhtin omits a dissection of carnival's hierarchy-reinforcing praxis: a glaring critical lacuna on his part, given that he distinguishes carnival from official medieval feasts. The latter events, 'whether ecclesiastic, feudal, or sponsored by the state, did not', Bakhtin posits, 'lead the people out of the existing world order and created no second life. On the contrary, they sanctioned the existing pattern of things and reinforced it' (*RW*, p. 9). The utopian elements that Bakhtin perceives in carnival, it appears, have beguiled him to such a degree that he eschews criticism of its corresponding function to official medieval feasts: reinforcing the established socio-hierarchical order.¹⁹

The ab-carnivalism in Miéville's speculative fiction does not share this function: it yields unapproved, hyper-transgressive destabilisations of everyday socio-hierarchical structure.

Ab-carnivalism is partly traceable to the ways in which Miéville's oeuvre leverages the denotative ambivalence, the simultaneous thereness and not-thereness, bespoke by 'ab-'.²⁰ In *The Scar* (2002), for example, Miéville specifies that vampir are 'ab-dead',²¹ that they possess, in other words, 'ab-life' (*S*, p. 558) born from their exposure to a bacillus. In its

¹⁹ In *Rabelais and His World*, Bakhtin attempts to substantiate the facticity of 'the second world' that the Feast of Fools—a carnivalesque festivity—generated via laughter. To do so, he cites a circular letter that members of the Paris School of Theology wrote in 1444 to apologise for, and extenuate their recent indulgence in, the Feast of Fools. The contents of said letter afford a valuable insight into the means by which carnival proper buttressed the status quo:

Wine barrels burst if from time to time we do not open them and let in some air. All of us men are barrels poorly put together, which would burst from the wine of wisdom, if this wine remains in a state of constant fermentation of piousness and fear of God. We must give it air in order not to let it spoil. This is why we permit folly on certain days [i.e., the days on which the Feast of Fools was celebrated] so that we may later return with greater zeal to the service of God. (*RW*, p. 75)

The apologists' letter evinces carnivalistic folly's contribution to maintaining and consolidating socio-hierarchical praxis among churchmen by way of renewing and concomitantly facilitated their everyday adherence to 'piousness and fear of God'.

²⁰ According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, 'ab-' is a prefix that '[f]orm[s] chiefly scientific adjectives and adverbs with the sense "position away from or underneath"' ('Ab-, Prefix', in *Oxford English Dictionary* <<https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/3302602801>> [accessed 18 October 2025]).

²¹ China Miéville, *The Scar* (London: Pan Books, 2003), p. 557. Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text.

sequel, *Iron Council* (2004), debates between thaumaturges, or magician-scientists, devolve into lethal exchanges of ‘charged ab-ions’,²² and the consummate golem-maker Judah Low employs a mechanism that amasses darkness, rendering nearby bricks ‘a catastrophe of physics, utterly abnatural’ (*IC*, p. 399). Miéville’s penchant for creating ab- formulations is also a method of perforating the membrane between reality and fiction. By way of illustration, *Kraken* (2010) contains ‘abmaths’,²³ the arcane text ‘*Abnatural Burnings*’ (*K*, p. 347, emphasis in original), an ‘ab-physical’ (*K*, p. 200) dimension, emissaries from the court of the ‘abseelie’ (*K*, p. 430) and ‘abnatural’ crimes (*K*, p. 135) tackled by the ‘abquotidian operatives’ (*K*, p. 102) of the Metropolitan Police’s Fundamentalist and Sect-Related Crime Unit. UnLondon, the heart of Miéville’s young adult novel *Un Lun Dun* (2007), is an ‘abcity’,²⁴ a product of which is its sprawling ‘abcityscape’ (*ULD*, p. 348). Londoners can gain access to the preternatural city by becoming ‘abnaut[s]’—by ‘crossing down, or up, or sideways, from there to here’ (*ULD*, p. 60). In accordance with its ambivalence-suffused prefix, my notion of ‘ab-carnivalism’ simultaneously cleaves to and deviates from the functions of Bakhtinian carnival.

Ab-carnivalism is variously a mode of activism or radical politics that serves as a hyper-transgressive and spatiotemporally flexible alternative to Bakhtinian carnival. It is an occasion in Miéville’s speculative fiction when commonfolk or slaves oppose authority figures by employing unlicensed forms of certain phenomena immanent in Bakhtinian carnival: familiarity, eccentricity, *mésalliances*, profanation and literal or figurative crownings–decrownings. Ab-carnivalism is either unsanctioned by governments or transcends the bounds of sanction. In opposition to its Bakhtinian harbinger, it thus entails authentic transgressions, circumventing reducibility to an affair bereft of political weight.

Ab-carnivalism’s unsanctioned transgressiveness renders it amenable to transcending Bakhtinian carnival’s inauthentic socio-hierarchical change. In an interview with Stephen

²² China Miéville, *Iron Council* (London: Macmillan, 2004), p. 106. Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text.

²³ China Miéville, *Kraken* (London: Macmillan, 2010), p. 85. Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text.

²⁴ China Miéville, *Un Lun Dun* (London: Macmillan, 2007), p. 71. Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text.

Shapiro, Miéville offers a relevant exposition of his methodology for narrating historical consciousness in his fiction:

If I have any kind of strategy, it would be about thinking of history as methodologies of change rather than narratives of particular historical moments. It would be about the depiction of moments of historical change in ways that are compelling, believable, and hopefully end in change, or at least interrogate why change does not happen. Obviously that's going to involve a plundering of history [...] You draw from history, yes, and then there are key moments that aren't reconfigurations of specific historical moments but moments of class power, such as when a group of police attack a particular demonstrator and there is a moment of pause, as everyone else waits for someone else to stop it, and then someone does, and it is someone who has not featured in the story before and does not feature again, and is not one of the obvious leaders of the insurrection. Rather than saying, here is way for readers to think about change, it is hopefully a way for depicting how change can happen in ways that are believable because they focus on the minutiae of moment to moment [*sic*] change, that does not come out of nowhere for readers because they have seen the staging of all these prior moments.²⁵

Ab-carnivalism is attentive to, and functionally dovetails with, Miéville's self-avowed fidelity to a compelling, believable narration of historical consciousness in his fiction. Ab-carnivalism occasionally engenders change by virtue of its moment-to-moment minutiae—familiarity, eccentricity, *mésalliances*, profanation and crownings—decrownings—unpredictably veering away from Bakhtinian carnival's officially predetermined and inflexible transformative framework. The change to which it gives rise may be cultural, social, political, linguistic or material. It may also be transitory or enduring. Unlike its Bakhtinian antecedent, ab-carnivalism is not only a fragment of a certain sociohistorical totality but also a possible vehicle for effecting its reconfiguration.

Ab-carnivalism wields revolutionary an unBakhtinian revolutionary power. In the prologue to *Rabelais and His World*, Michael Holquist declares that 'Bakhtin's carnival is [...] not only an impediment to revolutionary change, it is revolution itself'.²⁶ The ab-carnivalism found in Miéville's speculative fiction is neither a revolution nor an impediment to revolutionary change; rather, it is an affair that drives and facilitates revolutions.

²⁵ Stephen Shapiro, 'Gothic Politics: A Discussion with China Miéville', *Gothic Studies*, 10 (2008), 61–70 (p. 69).

²⁶ Michael Holquist, 'Prologue', in Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. by Helene Iswolsky (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1984), pp. xiii–xxiii (p. xviii).

‘[C]arnival is [...] without the rancour, discipline and organization essential for an effective revolutionary politics’, writes Eagleton. ‘Any politics which predicates itself on the carnivalesque moment alone will be no more than a complaint, containable libertarianism’.²⁷ Ab-carnivalism, however, bypasses functionality as a mere grumbling or curtailed libertarianism, because it entails partly or arrantly unlicensed modes of familiarity, eccentricity, *mésalliances*, profanation and crownings–decrownings. In other words, ab-carnivalism carries revolutionary potential because it makes a trope of Peter Stallybrass and Allon White’s observation that ‘given the presence of sharpened political antagonism [both in and during carnival], it may often act as *catalyst* and *site of actual and symbolic struggle*’.²⁸ In his interview with Gordon, Miéville offers a pertinent account of the link between dialectics and his fiction:

the point of dialectics as about *movement*, dynamism, tendencies within an overall, comprehensible, and total system is incredibly illuminating [...] in terms of historical change—[in terms of] the tensions that drive it being simultaneously *within* the system, and overthrowing it.

This is obvious in my fiction in that the social tensions and contradictions that drive plot are generally endogenous—I try to avoid the sense of a static system.²⁹

Ab-carnivalism can operate as a radical politics, since it arises from unattenuated or sharpened—and hence anti-Bakhtinian—socio-hierarchical tensions that destabilise staticity.

Ab-carnivalism, then, may be oriented toward, and may contribute to the emergence of, radical change, yet it never bears ties to a propagandist agenda on Miéville’s part. In an interview with Jayna Brown, Miéville contends that explicit propaganda is susceptible to destabilising a ‘contradictory, knotted, fully textured piece of fiction’.³⁰ He remarks, ‘The alternative to me is to [...] create a world [...] saturated by a certain kind of political texture [...] So they are not reducible to their politics, but politics are also not distinguishable from them’.³¹ The oft-discussed fact that Miéville is a staunch Marxist—an ‘active revolutionary

²⁷ Terry Eagleton, ‘Wittgenstein’s Friends’, *New Left Review*, 0 (1982), 64–90 (pp. 89–90).

²⁸ Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (London: Methuen, 1986), p. 14, emphasis in original.

²⁹ Gordon, ‘Reveling in Genre’, p. 364, emphasis in original.

³⁰ Jayna Brown, ‘Socialist Irrealism: An interview with China Miéville’, *Social Text*, 4 (2012)

<https://socialtextjournal.org/periscope_article/socialist_irrealism_an_interview_with_china_mieville/>

[accessed 21 September 2025].

³¹ Brown, ‘Socialist Irrealism’.

socialist’,³² he once called himself—never relegates ab-carnivalism to propaganda. Instead, this Bakhtinian-Miévillean phenomenon is formative to the ‘political texture’ with which Miéville endows his fiction (in an interview with Nick Gevers, he employs the tantamount phrase ‘texture of the real’, describing it as the product of his fiction ‘dealing with ideas like racism, class inequality, economics, governmental power, and so on’³³).

Ab-carnivalism’s potential to beget authentic change is indivisible from the fact that Bakhtinian carnival is a detextualised Tolkienian fantasy. Bakhtinian carnival warrants this classification because it is informed by extratextual permutations of three elements that J.R.R. Tolkien attributes to fantasy literature in his seminal essay ‘On Fairy-Stories’ (1946): Escape, sub-creation and Consolation.

Literary fantasy, says Tolkien, affords its readers ‘the Escape of the Prisoner’—a positive and, occasionally, ‘heroic’ deed—rather than ‘the Flight of the Deserter’.³⁴ Critics who conflate Escape with the Flight of the Deserter, he adds, evoke ‘a Party-spokesman [who] might have labelled departure from the misery of the Führer's or any other Reich and even criticism of it as treachery’ (*OFS*, p. 69). The Escape of fantasy offers deliverance from ‘ancient limitations’, from objectionable realities that include ‘the noise, stench, ruthlessness, and extravagance of the internal-combustion engine’, or ‘hunger, thirst, poverty, pain, sorrow, injustice, death’ (*OFS*, p. 73). Sub-creation invariably yields Escape because it is rooted in a hereness–thereness interplay.³⁵ Tolkien notes that sub-creation transpires when a story-maker constructs a fictional world divorced from its extratextual variant, or ‘the Primary World’ (*OFS*, p. 52). The fruit of their labour is ‘a Secondary World’ into which one’s mind can enter and, therefore, experience Escape. Suspension of disbelief is a prerequisite for any Secondary

³² John Newsinger, ‘Fantasy and Revolution: An Interview with China Miéville’, *International Socialism*, 88 (2000) <<http://pubs.socialistreviewindex.org.uk/isj88/newsinger.htm>> [accessed 3 October 2025].

³³ Nick Gevers, ‘Cities Near, Cities Far: An Interview with China Miéville’, *Infinity Plus*, <<http://www.infinityplus.co.uk/nonfiction/intchina2.htm>> [accessed 3 October 2025].

³⁴ J. R. R. Tolkien, ‘On Fairy-Stories’, in *Tolkien on Fairy-Stories*, ed. by Verlyn Flieger and Douglas A. Anderson (London: HarperCollins, 2014), pp. 27–84 (p. 67). Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text.

³⁵ Sub-creation and, in turn, Escape are bound up with fantasy’s enablement of what Tolkien designates Recovery. To exercise his words, ‘Recovery (which includes return and renewal of health) is a [...] regaining of a clear view’; that is, it involves us “‘seeing things as we are (or were) meant to see them”—as things apart from ourselves’ (*OFS*, p. 67). Such Recovery, Tolkien clarifies, proceeds from the fact that ‘[w]e need [...] to clean our windows; so that the things seen clearly may be freed from the drab blur of triteness or familiarity—from possessiveness’ (*OFS*, p. 67).

World's viability: one can pretend-believe in it only if its constituent laws are internally consistent (*OFS*, p. 52). If such a prerequisite is not satisfied, the fantasy fiction's reader is expelled from the Secondary World; they are thrust back into its Primary cousin (*OFS*, p. 52).³⁶

Escape is the seed from which literary fantasies' capacity for Consolation springs. '[T]here are old ambitions and desires [...] to which they offer a kind of satisfaction and consolation', writes Tolkien: among them are 'the desire to visit, free as a fish, the deep sea; or the longing for the noiseless, gracious, economical flight of a bird'; or 'the desire to converse with other living things' (*OFS*, p. 73). For Tolkien, '[t]he 'highest function' of fantasy fiction is 'the Consolation of the Happy Ending', or 'the good catastrophe, the sudden joyous "turn"' (*OFS*, p. 75, emphasis in original). He calls this '*Eucatastrophe*' (*OFS*, p. 75, emphasis in original).

Bakhtinian carnival is a detextualised Tolkienian fantasy because it births 'a second world' (*RW*, p. 6) that is 'vividly felt as an escape from the usual official way of life' (*RW*, p. 8). It also qualifies as such because it bears a 'fantastic nature' traceable to its affordance of 'utopian freedom' (*RW*, p. 89)—that is, its suspension of established socio-hierarchical inequality (*RW*, p. 10; *PDP*, p. 123)—and consolingly licensed transgression. Bakhtinian carnival, in other words, qualifies as a detextualised Tolkienian fantasy owing to its immanent satisfaction of three criteria that Tolkien ascribes to fantasy: sub-creation, escape and consolation. It evokes a transposition of these fantasy elements from the realm of the literary-psychological to that of the palpably experienced. Since Bakhtinian carnival forestalls the masses' partaking in anti-authority transgression and thus reinforces the status quo, it is a conservative vein of detextualised Tolkien fantasy. The ab-carnivalism in Miéville's fiction opposes this Bakhtinian vein of Tolkienian fantasy on the grounds that it dovetails with his self-professed disdain for consolatory aesthetics. In his interview with Gordon, Miéville aptly

³⁶ In an interview with John McDonald, Miéville avows that he has 'a lot of respect' for Tolkien's 'revolutionary' formalisation of sub-creation: 'there's no question', he points out, 'that that [act on Tolkien's part] was an extraordinarily important moment in fiction in general and fantasy in particular' (John McDonald, 'Fantasy, Science Fiction, and Politics: An Interview with China Miéville', *International Socialist Review* <<https://isreview.org/issue/75/fantasy-science-fiction-and-politics/index.html>> [accessed 30 September 2025]). This interview is also featured in *A New Age of Austerity: The Latest Phase of the Global Crisis*, special issue of *International Socialist Review* (2011).

expounds why he objects to the consolatory spirit that Tolkien imparts to *The Lord of the Rings* (1954–1955)³⁷:

To me, consolation is about an aesthetic which eases the relationship of the reader to reality, which smooths over contradictions. [...] If you have a big happy ending you might be saying ‘The status quo was benevolent, and has been restored.’ The idea here is that social contradiction comes from outside and has been vanquished. Alternatively, though, you might take Tolkien’s approach, and rather wistfully argue that the world is post-lapsarian, and that therefore it is Tragic, and a Vale of Sorrows. In other words, the fucked-up mess and intrinsic tensions have been explained away. It’s tragic, sad, yes, but it still consoles in that it smooths over everyday tensions.³⁸

Given these remarks, Miéville would, no doubt, regard Bakhtinian carnival’s suspension of usual socio-hierarchical dialectics as a consolatory smoothing over of social tensions.

Miéville divulges to Gordon that he attempts to ‘avoid’ consolation in his fiction via ‘a continuing refusal to posit societies as internally coherent, consistent, bounded, and essentially safe’.³⁹ By his own admission, Miéville instead posits ‘fractured and dangerous’ societies in which ‘[t]he dynamics tearing them apart [...] are intrinsic’.⁴⁰ Because ab-carnivalism springs from unmediated, anti-Bakhtinian socio-hierarchical dialectics, it

³⁷ Miéville’s aversion to *The Lord of the Rings* springs from more than just its consolatory aesthetic. Miéville has criticised the novel’s linguistic clichés: ‘Laughter comes in “torrents”, brooks “babble”, and swords never fail to “flash”’; sentences are frequently marked by clause-reversal (e.g., ‘Fey he [King Théoden] seemed’); and ‘[t]he dialogue sounds faintly ridiculous’ (it is ‘stilted and clumsy’, betokening a ‘cod Wagnerian [*sic*] pomposity’) (China Miéville, ‘Tolkien – Middle Earth [*sic*] Meets Middle England’, *Socialist Review*, 259, (2002) <<http://socialistreview.org.uk/259/tolkien-middle-earth-meets-middle-england>> [accessed 4 October 2025]). Miéville, too, has criticised the novel’s thematic clichés. Its storytelling, he asserts, is ‘structured by moralist, abstract logic, rather than being grounded and organic’; that is, ‘morality is absolute, and political complexities conveniently evaporate’, thus generating ‘a conservative hymn to order and reason – to the status quo’ (Miéville, ‘Tolkien – Middle Earth [*sic*] Meets Middle England’)). Years later, in an interview with Ben Eastham, Miéville divulged the rationale for him having eschewed his younger self’s approach to lambasting Tolkien’s fiction: ‘I said various things about Tolkien, explaining in a swaggering, young, punky way why I disliked his work. Then, when I would go to conventions people began to say, “China, do the Tolkien thing!” so you have to stop’ (Ben Eastham, ‘An Interview with China Miéville’, *The White Review*, December 2012 <<https://www.thewhitereview.org/feature/interview-with-china-mieville/>> [accessed 3 October 2025]). This interview is also featured in *The White Review*, February 2011, issue no. 1.

³⁸ Gordon, ‘Reveling in Genre’, p. 366. Miéville wrote the introduction to Michael Moorcock’s *Wizardry and Wild Romance: A Study of Epic Fantasy* (1987), acclaiming ‘Epic Pooh’—the essay-chapter in which Moorcock devotes several pages to castigating *The Lord of the Rings*—as ‘a tremendous piece of work’ and ‘a hinge-point in [his] life’ (China Miéville, ‘Michael Moorcock – Extreme Librarian: Introduction’, in Michael Moorcock, *Wizardry and Wild Romance: A Study of Epic Fantasy* (Austin, TX: MonkeyBrain, 2004), pp. 11–14 (p. 14, emphasis in original). The ‘predominant tone’ of *The Lord of the Rings* belongs to the ‘nursery-room’, Moorcock argues: ‘It is a lullaby; it is meant to soothe and console. It is mouth music. It is frequently enjoyed [...] for its lack of tensions. It coddles; it makes friends with you; it tells you comforting lies’ (Michael Moorcock, *Wizardry and Wild Romance: A Study of Epic Fantasy* (Austin, TX: MonkeyBrain, 2004), p. 124).

³⁹ Gordon, ‘Reveling in Genre’, p. 366.

⁴⁰ Gordon, ‘Reveling in Genre’, p. 366.

circumvents the consolatory aesthetic—the smoothing over of social tensions—that Miéville authorially opposes. It amplifies pre-existing socio-hierarchical tensions or inspires new variants of them, thus endowing Miéville’s speculative fiction with the anti-consolatory character that he favours. The authentic socio-hierarchical tensions that animate ab-carnivalism foreclose its susceptibility to the consolatory mechanisms of its Bakhtinian antecedent.

2. Grotesque Realism and Xenosomatic Degradation

The xenosomatic degradation belonging to Miéville’s speculative fiction derives from Bakhtin’s theorisation of grotesque realism in *Rabelais and His World*.

Bakhtin recognises two interrelated determinants of the grotesque image. The first is an association with time: said image ‘reflects a phenomenon in transformation, an as yet unfinished metamorphosis, of death and birth, growth and becoming’ (*RW*, p. 24). The second determinant of the grotesque image, Bakhtin notes, is ambivalence: it depicts ‘both poles of transformation, the old and the new, the dying and the procreating, the beginning and the end of the [referenced] metamorphosis’ (*RW*, p. 24). Bakhtin observes that the image of the grotesque body is counterposed to modern canons because ‘it is unfinished, outgrows itself, transgresses its own limits’ (*RW*, p. 26). It foregrounds the orifices and protuberances—the erect penis, the potbelly, the breasts, the gaping mouth, the nose—as they are ‘the parts through which the world enters the body or emerges from it, or through which the body itself goes out to meet the world’ (*RW*, p. 26). The grotesque image, Bakhtin points out, ‘discloses its essence as a principle of growth which exceeds its own limits only in copulation, pregnancy, childbirth, the throes of death, eating, drinking, or defecation’ (*RW*, p. 26). Carnivalistic praxes and ideals are formative to this permutation of grotesque image: ‘The depth, variety, and power of separate grotesque themes can be understood only within the unity of folk and carnival spirit. If examined outside of this unity, they become one-sided, flat, and stripped of their rich content’ (*RW*, pp. 51–52). The grotesque image, Bakhtin remarks, underwent ‘a considerable and substantial development’ (*RW*, p. 27) in medieval carnival.

Bakhtin's grotesque realism arises from the carnivalisation of literature. Indeed, Bakhtin holds that Renaissance images of the grotesque are 'directly related to folk carnival culture [...] in [the works of] Rabelais, Cervantes, and Shakespeare' (*RW*, p. 52). In the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, moreover, '[t]he carnival spirit and grotesque imagery continued to live and was transmitted as a now purely literary tradition, especially as a tradition of the Renaissance' (*RW*, p. 35). In other words, carnivalistic manifestations of the grotesque image experienced a transposition into the genre of literature that Bakhtin christens grotesque realism:

There was a formalization of carnival-grotesque images, which permitted them to be used in many different ways and for various purposes. This formalization was not only exterior; the contents of the carnival-grotesque element, its artistic, heuristic, and unifying forces were preserved in all essential manifestations during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries: in the *commedia dell'arte* (which kept a close link with its carnival origin), in Moliere's comedies (related to the *commedia dell'arte*), in the comic novel and travesty of the seventeenth century, in the tales of Voltaire and Diderot (*Les bijoux indiscrets*, *Jacques le fataliste*), in the work of Swift, and a few others. In all these writings, in spite of their differences in character and tendency, the carnival-grotesque form exercises the same function: to consecrate inventive freedom, to permit the combination of a variety of different elements and their rapprochement, to liberate from the prevailing point of view of the world, from conventions and established truths, from clichés, from all that is humdrum and universally accepted. This carnival spirit offers the chance to have a new outlook on the world, to realize the relative nature of all that exists, and to enter a completely new order of things. (*RW*, p. 34, emphasis in original)

Grotesque realism, Bakhtin argues, proceeds from 'the material bodily principle, that is, images of the human body with its food, drink, defecation, and sexual life' (*RW*, p. 18). The heritage of said principle is 'that peculiar type of imagery and, more broadly speaking, [...] that peculiar aesthetic concept which is characteristic of [...] folk culture' (*RW*, p. 18). Grotesque realism lays stress on the material bodily principle's 'all-popular festive and utopian aspect', or its 'cosmic and at the same time all-people's character' (*RW*, p. 19). Bakhtin has it that every somatic element in grotesque realism 'becomes grandiose, exaggerated, immeasurable' because it is 'contained not in the biological individual, not in the bourgeois ego, but in the people, a people who are continually growing and renewed' (*RW*, p. 19). This, then, is how grotesque realism captures the ethos of carnival folk culture.

An idiosyncratic style of degradation is formative to grotesque realism. To exercise Bakhtin's words, '[t]he essential principle of grotesque realism is degradation, that is, the lowering of all that is high, spiritual, ideal, abstract; it is a transfer to the material level, to the sphere of earth and body in their indissoluble unity' (*RW*, pp. 19–20). Bakhtin clarifies that the functionality of this degradation on which grotesque realism depends is informed by certain topographical meanings:

'Downward' is earth, 'upward' is heaven. Earth is an element that devours, swallows up (the grave, the womb) and at the same time an element of birth, of renascence (the maternal breasts). Such is the meaning of 'upward' and 'downward' in their cosmic aspect, while in their purely bodily aspect, which is not clearly distinct from the cosmic, the upper part is the face or the head and the lower part is the genital organs, the belly, and the buttocks. (*RW*, p. 21)

The degradation at the heart of Bakhtin's posited grotesque realism is predicated on ambivalence expressed by a symbiosis between destruction and regeneration:

Degradation here means coming down to earth, the contact with earth as an element that swallows up and gives birth at the same time. To degrade is to bury, to sow, and to kill simultaneously, in order to bring forth something more and better. To degrade also means to concern oneself with the lower stratum of the body, the life of the belly and the reproductive organs; it therefore relates to acts of defecation and copulation, conception, pregnancy, and birth. Degradation digs a bodily grave for a new birth; it has not only a destructive, negative aspect, but also a regenerating one. To degrade an object does not imply merely hurling it into the void of nonexistence, into absolute destruction, but to hurl it down to the reproductive lower stratum, the zone in which conception and a new birth take place. Grotesque realism knows no other lower level; it is the fruitful earth and the womb. It is always conceiving. (*RW*, p. 21)

This ambivalent degradation—this interplay between destructiveness and creativity—repudiates the concept of a more or less ossified body. It imparts to manifestations of the body featured in grotesque realism both a literal and figurative mutability that can articulate and subvert socio-ideological tensions.

The Bakhtinian-Miévillan phenomenon that I am calling xenosomatic degradation stems from the ambivalent carnivalistic degradation intrinsic to Bakhtin's grotesque realism.⁴¹

⁴¹ In an interview with Gavin J. Grant, Miéville asserts, 'I certainly see myself as writing in a grotesque tradition. [...] [M]y sense of it [the grotesque] is a reconfiguration of the familiar into a kind of combatively alienating experience. [...] A woman whose head is a giant beetle is grotesque' (Gavin J. Grant, 'The Future of

‘Xenosomatic’ is my neologism that signifies strange bodies (as per the *Oxford English Dictionary*, ‘xeno-’ denotes ‘foreign, strange’,⁴² whereas ‘somatic’ denotes ‘[o]f or relating to the (or a) body; bodily, corporeal, physical’⁴³). Xenosomatic degradation unfolds in Miéville’s speculative fiction when humanoid or inhuman bodies—xenosomas—perform grotesque realism’s carnivalistic destruction–regeneration in fashions that impact the sensuous or abstract world (e.g., ingestion, defecation, copulation, mutilation and dismemberment). The xenosomas at issue encompass mosquito-women from whose mouths there springs a twelve-inch proboscis; an enfleshed, sentient piece of art traceable to Surrealist praxis; a protean familiar capable of assimilating all material things; and a malevolent sack-ghost. The object of xenosomatic degradation is always an inanimate or living thing: a block of organic paste, a sow, a person’s body, and so on. The upper strata of Miéville’s xenosomas—everything above the stomach, rather than the head or the face *tout court*, as in grotesque realism—can effect xenosomatic degradation. This is an advantage of their non-mimetic facets and, sometimes, their mutability. Xenosomatic degradation’s essential destruction–regeneration dyad bespeaks carnivalistic ambivalence unlike the invariably positive sort that Bakhtin assigns to grotesque realism. A living thing, in other words, can negatively experience xenosomatic degradation, as when the slake-moths in Miéville’s first Bas-Lag novel, *Perdido Street Station* (2000), use its ambivalent carnivalistic functionality to reinvigorate their prodigious, multi-appendaged bodies by ingesting the minds of their prey (this act is discussed in Chapter Four). Xenosomatic degradation’s destruction–regeneration power departs from that of grotesque realism in another fashion: it subordinates a downward motion to its exemplificative acts. That is, the importance of xenosomatic degradation is found not in the direction of the movement by which it occurs, but in the result of its destruction–regeneration. In Miéville’s speculative fiction, xenosomatic

British Fiction is Getting Weirder: An Interview with China Miéville’, *IndieBound*, <<https://www.indiebound.org/author-interviews/mievillechina>> [accessed 5 October 2025]. Here, too, Miéville points out that he ‘like[s] the grotesque because its ornery, and also because it tends to be more grittily corporeal -- gross, physical, fantasy. Materialist, philosophically speaking’ (Grant, ‘The Future of British Fiction is Getting Weirder’).

⁴² ‘Xeno-, Comb. Form’, in *Oxford English Dictionary* <<https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/9219452357>> [accessed 13 October 2025].

⁴³ ‘Somatic, Adj. & N.’, in *Oxford English Dictionary* <<https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/6214606600>> [accessed 13 October].

degradation ultimately registers a connection between non-mimetic bodies and a modified sort of Bakhtinian carnivalistic ambivalence.

3. The Novelty of This Thesis

The ab-carnivalism and xenosomatic degradation that I propound serve as original, productive contributions to Miéville scholarship by filling distinct critical lacunae.

Both phenomena, for instance, enable Bakhtinian readings of Miéville's speculative fiction that reorient the Marxist framework often applied to it. In *The Communist Manifesto* (1848),⁴⁴ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels detail how class conflict—the lifeblood of Marxism—produces social change:

The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles. Freeman and slave, patrician and plebeian, lord and serf, guild-master and journeyman, in a word, oppressor and oppressed, stood in constant opposition to one another, carried on an uninterrupted, now hidden, now open fight, a fight that each time ended, either in a revolutionary reconstitution of society at large, or in the common ruin of the contending classes.⁴⁵

By also locating conflict between the oppressor and the oppressed as a prerequisite for a reconstitution of society that benefits the latter, ab-carnivalism dovetails with the many scholarly writings that have evaluated how certain Marxist principles relate to the composition of Miéville's fictional worlds.⁴⁶ Indeed, ab-carnivalism periodically reconstitutes societies via a radical disruption of oppressor–dialectics that creates political solidarity and

⁴⁴ Miéville offers a reading of this foundational Marxist text in *A Spectre, Haunting: On the Communist Manifesto* (2022).

⁴⁵ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, 2nd edn, trans. by Samuel Moore (Penguin Books: London, 2002), p. 219.

⁴⁶ See Carl Freedman, 'Towards a Marxist Urban Sublime: Reading China Miéville's *King Rat*', *Extrapolation*, 44 (2003), 395–408; Carl Freedman, 'To the Perdido Street Station: The Representation of Revolution in China Miéville's *Iron Council*', *Extrapolation*, 46 (2005), 235–248; Carl Freedman, 'Speculative Fiction and International Law: The Marxism of China Miéville', *Socialism and Democracy*, 20 (2006), 25–39; Sandy Rankin, 'AGASH AGASP AGAPE: The Weaver as Immanent Utopian Impulse in China Miéville's *Perdido Street Station* and *Iron Council*', *Extrapolation*, 50 (2009), 239–257; Rich Paul Cooper, 'Building Worlds: Dialectical Materialism as Method in China Miéville's *Bas-Lag*', *Extrapolation*, 50 (2009), 212–223; Daniel Hourigan, 'On the Possibility of Legal Form in Miéville's Speculative Fictions', *Law and Literature*, 30 (2018), 167–184; Rahime Çokay Nebioğlu, 'The Immanence of the New Weird: China Miéville's *Perdido Street Station*', in *Deleuze and the Schizoanalysis of Dystopia* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), pp. 93–133; Tomás Vergara, 'Marxism as Narrative World-Building Method: New Weird Fiction and Capitalist Crisis in China Miéville's *Bas-Lag* Trilogy', in *Alterity and Capitalism in Speculative Fiction Estranging Contemporary History* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2023), pp. 33–71.

opportunities for genuine, lasting change. Ab-carnivalism, then, is a unique contribution to Miévillean-Marxist scholarship because of its rootedness in radicalised versions of the carnivalistic dynamics identified by Bakhtinian.

Many scholars have variously positioned the New Weird as a critical framework for interpreting the quiddities of Miéville's speculative fiction.⁴⁷ Both ab-carnivalism and xenosomatic degradation are bound up with, and reorient the analytical methodology of, this New Weird vein of Miéville scholarship. According to Benjamin Noys and Timothy S. Murphy, the New Weird is marked by an engagement with forms of otherness that rupture the status quo:

The New Weird can be characterized as a new sensibility of welcoming the alien and the monstrous as sites of affirmation and becoming. [...] [T]he New Weird adopts a more radical politics that treats the alien, the hybrid, and the chaotic as subversions of the various normalizations of power and subjectivity.⁴⁸

Ab-carnivalism and xenosomatic degradation pertinently reveal how that which is alien, hybrid or chaotic in Miéville's speculative fiction—not just his New Weirdian Bas-Lag trilogy—breach established frameworks of power and subjectivity. In other words, these two strains of modified Bakhtinian thought represent original contributions to scholarship by demonstrating that Miéville's speculative fiction often narratively reproduces the New Weird's formative aesthetic principles. In this thesis, the ways that ab-carnivalism and xenosomatic degradation are responsible for New Weirdian violations of power and

⁴⁷ See Jonathan R. Harvey, 'The Wild West and the New Weird in K. J. Bishop's *The Etched City* and China Miéville's *Iron Council*', *Contemporary Literature*, 53 (2012), 87–113; Carl Freedman, 'From Genre to Political Economy: Miéville's *The City & The City* and Uneven Development', *CR: The New Centennial Review*, 13 (2013), 13–30; Kelly Budruweit, 'The Value of Fantasy in the Monstrous: China Miéville and Kelly Link's Weird Integrations of Critique and Affirmation', *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts*, 32 (2021), 225–243; Guido Isekenmeier, 'Descriptive Economy in the New Weird Short Story: China Miéville's "The Condition of New Death"', *Zeitschrift für Anglistik und Amerikanistik*, 69 (2021), 143–157; Christoph Reinfandt, 'The Long and the Short of It: Approaching the (Un-)Representable in China Miéville's "The Tain" (2002) and "The Condition of New Death" (2014)', *Zeitschrift für Anglistik und Amerikanistik*, 69 (2021), 129–142; Jake Poller, 'New Weird Fiction and the Oneirologic of Both-And', *Textual Practice*, 37 (2023), 1265–1280; Thomas Rauth, 'Forms and Functions of Description in the (New) Weird', *Anglia*, 141 (2023), 407–430; Subham Mukherjee and Arunima Ghosh, 'A Mosaic in Mutation: The Divergent and Transgressive Grotesquerie of China Miéville', *Tamkang Review*, 53 (2023), 53–82; Elisa Mazzocato, 'Weird Ghosts of the Anthropocene: The Spectral Encounter in New Weird Fiction as a Conceptual Metaphor for Ecocritical Theory', *Ecozon@*, 15 (2024), 156–172.

⁴⁸ Benjamin Noys and Timothy S. Murphy, 'Introduction: Old and New Weird', *Genre*, 49 (2016), 117–134 (p. 125).

subjectivity are ultimately shown to be diverse, ranging from the familiar to the bizarre, from small to large, and from temporary to lasting.

At present, a handful of scholars have produced writings that draw attention to the interrelationship between Bakhtinian carnival and Miéville's speculative fiction. Jonathan Newell, for example, observes that the strike action implemented by the multifarious familiars in *Kraken* is telling because, '[a]s in other Miéville novels, [...] carnivalesque topsy-turviness and the insurrection of the urban working-class [here] prove temporary'.⁴⁹ Vera Benczik, meanwhile, maps Bakhtinian carnival's praxis of status quo-reinforcement onto Miéville's fictional city-state New Crobuzon:

Miéville's New Crobuzon [...] echo[es] the infernal chaos of a Bosch painting and the feel of a carnival—spaces and events where transgression and subversion are the norm. Yet, similarly to the well-regulated position of the carnival within the Christian church year, the urban chaos [of New Crobuzon] is contextualized within the framework of order—the urban grid—and this ultimately strengthens that world order instead of unravelling it.⁵⁰

In his analysis of *Iron Council*, Carl Freedman notes that the New Crobuzon Collective—a motley band of commonfolk-insurrectionists—create a temporary and 'limited but authentically utopian zone of popular democracy [...] in (parts of) New Crobuzon',⁵¹ therefore implicitly capturing their formation of a revolutionary carnival. A large part of this thesis's novelty lies in ab-carnivalism's filling of a critical lacuna generated by these scholars: an exposition of how unsanctioned, radicalised iterations of Bakhtinian carnival's constitutive phenomena affect the social and political matrices in Miéville's speculative fiction.

There is a further reason why ab-carnivalism is a novel addition to existing Miéville scholarship: it augments a nascent branch of ab- concepts. Among them is 'ab-realism', which is, in the words of its maker, Sherryl Vint, 'a narrative logic [in Miéville's fiction] that simultaneously captures the absurdities of 'real' life under capitalism *and* points to the power

⁴⁹ Jonathan Newell, 'China Miéville's *Kraken*, Degeneration, and the Urban Gothic', in *Urban Monstrosities: Perversity and Upheaval in the Unreal City*, ed. by Joseph DeFalco Lamperez and J. Alexandra McGhee (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2017), pp. 13–27 (p. 24).

⁵⁰ Vera Benczik, 'The Doubled City: The Displaced London in the Urban Fantasy Novels of Neil Gaiman and China Miéville', in *Displacing the Anxieties of Our World: Spaces of the Imagination*, ed. by Ildikó Limpár (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2017), pp. 162–176 (p. 163).

⁵¹ Carl Freedman, *Art and Idea in the Novels of China Miéville* (Canterbury: Gylphi, 2015), p. 74.

of narrative to activate the utopian traces of another world that is possible and coexists with this one'.⁵² Mark P. Williams has proposed the coinage 'ab-London[s]' to 'describe instances of [Miéville's fantastic-shaped] London[s] becoming estranged by means of something apocalyptic or transformative, and moving *away* from the familiar London and towards something definitively more estranging'.⁵³ Williams has also posited the term 'abnatural resources', contending that it denotes 'the things, people and activities [in Miéville's fiction] which [...] are fantastic extensions of actual cultural practices [,] [and] which reveal shared or communal resources which are not instrumental to capitalism'.⁵⁴ The most notable, and possibly the most fecund, of all ab- concepts is that which Miéville himself has posited in relation to Weird Fiction,⁵⁵ namely 'the abcanny':

The monsters of the abcanny are teratological expressions of that unrepresentable and unknowable, the evasive of meaning. Hence the enormous preponderance of shapeless, oozing gloopiness in the abcanny monstrous, the stress on formlessness, shapes that ostentatiously evade symbolic decoding by being all shapes and no shapes.
[...]
[...] [A]ny of the meanings that the Weird might mean, do not obviate the abcanny's beyond-meaning-ness. That is the axis on which it works, and by the deployment of which it (inevitably) means. These monsters mean, while they meta un-mean.⁵⁶

Given the prevenient ab- concepts, the critical novelty of ab-carnivalism stems from its rootedness in Bakhtinian-Miévillean forms of narrative transgression in Miéville's speculative fiction. It exhibits the viability of positioning ab-Bakhtinian thought as a lens through which to examine Miéville's imagined worlds.

⁵² Sherryl Vint, 'Ab-realism: Fractal Language and Social Change', ed. by Caroline Edwards and Tony Venezia (Canterbury: Gylphi, 2015), in *China Miéville: Critical Essays* (Canterbury: Gylphi, 2015), pp. 39–59 (p. 41, emphasis in original).

⁵³ Mark P. Williams, 'The Un-, Ab-, and Alter-London[s] of China Miéville: Imaginary Spaces for Concrete Subjects', in *London and Contemporary British Fiction: The City Beyond the City*, ed. by Nick Hubble and Phillip Tew (Bloomsbury: London, 2016), pp. 177–194 (p. 179, emphasis in original).

⁵⁴ Mark P. Williams, 'Abnatural Resources: Collective Experience, Community and Commonality from Embassytown to New Crobuzon', in *China Miéville: Critical Essays* (Canterbury: Gylphi, 2015), pp. 239–264 (p. 241).

⁵⁵ 'If considered at all, Weird Fiction', writes Miéville, 'is usually, roughly, conceived of as a rather breathless and generically slippery macabre fiction, a dark fantastic ("horror" plus "fantasy")' (China Miéville, 'Weird Fiction', in *The Routledge Companion to Science Fiction*, ed. by Mark Bould and others (Abingdon: Routledge, 2009), pp. 510–515 (p. 510)).

⁵⁶ China Miéville, 'On Monsters: Or, Nine or More (Monstrous) Not Cannies', *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts*, 23 (2012), 377–392 (pp. 381–382).

Various critics have discussed the non-mimetic bodies that inhabit Miéville's fiction. Joan Gordon evinces the correspondence between hybridity and grotesquerie in *Perdido Street Station* via analyses of both a scarab-headed woman and the widely disparaged underclass of somatically distorted convicts styled Remade.⁵⁷ Subham Mukherjee and Arunima Ghosh have expounded the transgressive implications of what they judge to be Miéville's politicising teratology in *King Rat* and *Kraken*.⁵⁸ For Christopher Kendrick, some of the humanoid species in Miéville's Bas-Lag trilogy—*Perdido Street Station*, *The Scar* and *Iron Council*—boast Marxist resonances:

The 'postmodern' theme of hybridity is firmly situated within the coming logic of class, with the result that Miéville's monsters have more class resonance than monsters customarily do. [...] [T]he suggestion is [...] that comparatively, they palpably reflect long-term social antagonisms, that the hope and dread they rouse clearly responds to capitalist contradictions current and future, as well as ancient.⁵⁹

Kelly Budruweit demonstrates how the slake-moths in *Perdido Street Station* concretise an extratextual correlation between the fantastic aesthetic and capitalism.⁶⁰ According to Steven Shaviro, there is a prominent association between the slake-moths in *Perdido Street Station* and Karl Marx's comments regarding the vampiric quiddities of capitalism: 'in their rapacity and insatiability – and indeed, in their very presence in the air over the city [New Crobuzon] – the slake-moths are an expression, or better an *exudation*, of the self-valorising movements of capital', their ingestion of people's minds recalling 'the appropriation and accumulation of human mental creativity'.⁶¹ Rather than 'alienated workers, producing value but excluded from its enjoyment', the creatures' victims, Shaviro points out, 'are already-exhausted sources of value, former vessels of creative activity and self-reflexivity that have been entirely consumed and cast aside. No longer capable of living labour, they are not a renewable resource'.⁶² In short, Miéville's humanoid and inhuman creations, or what I am

⁵⁷ Joan Gordon, 'Hybridity, Heterotopia, and Mateship in China Miéville's *Perdido Street Station*', *Science Fiction Studies*, 30 (2003), 456–476 (pp. 458–460).

⁵⁸ Subham Mukherjee and Arunima Ghosh, 'A Mosaic in Mutation: The Divergent and Transgressive Grotesquerie of China Miéville', *Tamkang Review*, 53 (2023), 53–82.

⁵⁹ Christopher Kendrick, 'Socialism and Fantasy: China Miéville's Fables of Race and Class', *The Monthly Review*, 67 (2016), 13–24 (p. 17).

⁶⁰ Kelly Budruweit, 'The Value of Fantasy in the Monstrous: China Miéville and Kelly Link's Weird Integrations of Critique and Affirmation', *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts*, 32 (2021), 225–243 (pp. 229–231).

⁶¹ Steven Shaviro, 'Capitalist Monsters', *Historical Materialism*, 10 (2002), 281–290 (p. 287, emphasis in original).

⁶² Shaviro, 'Capitalist Monsters', p. 286.

calling xenosomas, possess characteristics that render them loci of manifold scholarly research.

At its core, xenosomatic degradation fills a broad lacuna in Miéville scholarship: an evaluation of the ways in which Miéville's assortment of fiction-dwelling xenosomas reconfigure their lives and worlds via a carnivalistic destruction–regeneration dyad. Xenosomatic degradation calls attention to the hitherto-concealed reality that this carnivalistic dyad is remarkably well-equipped to bringing forth the empowerment of xenosomas because it accommodates and expands their idiosyncrasies.

4. The Structure of This Thesis

This thesis consists of four chapters. Chapter One presents a critique of ab-carnivalism in six Miéville fictions: *Iron Council*, *Perdido Street Station*,⁶³ *Kraken*, “‘Tis the Season’ (2004), *Un Lun Dun* and *The Scar*. These ab-carnivalisms, it argues, reflect how ab-carnivalism in general not only accommodates variegated kinds of communal mobilisation against oppressive authority figures, but also, as in those of *Un Lun Dun* and *The Scar*, can induce radical change. Chapter Two assesses the ties between ab-carnivalism and renegade cities, or ‘renegopoleis’—my pluralisation of Miéville’s neologism ‘renegopolis’—in *Iron Council*. This chapter maintains that both the Iron Council and the New Crobuzon Collective possess renegopoleis that spring from, and are influenced by, ab-carnivalism. Chapter Three posits an interplay between Bakhtin’s notion of heteroglossia and carnivalism of the Bakhtinian and ab- variety in *Embassytown*, arguing that it informs disruptions to the familiar, putatively

⁶³ In an interview with Mark Bould, Miéville explains that *Perdido Street Station* was an attempt on his part to ‘write a deliberately anti-Tolkienesque fantasy’:

Having decided the basic thrust of the story and the aesthetic, I then made a checklist of the kind of things Tolkien does and set out to invert them: so where his is a feudal world, mine is capitalist; his is rural, mine is urban; his is very Manichean in its morality, mine is all about shades of grey -- and not even shades of grey, really, but genuinely insoluble moral and political conundrums, where there is no right answer. (Mark Bould, ‘Appropriate Means: An Interview with China Miéville’, *New Politics*, 9 (2003) < <https://archive.newpol.org/issue35/bould35.htm> > [accessed 30 September 2025])

In an interview with John Berlyne, Miéville offers a corresponding account of his Tolkien-divergent methodology for writing *Perdido Street Station* (John Berlyne, ‘An Interview with China Miéville’, *SFRevu* < <https://www.sfrevu.com/ISSUES/2002/0204/Feature%20-%20China/interview.htm> > [accessed 30 September 2025]).

fixed mechanisms of the alien language at the novel's heart. Chapter Four dissects xenosomatic degradation in an assemblage of Miéville fictions: four novels (*King Rat*, *Perdido Street Station*, *Embassytown* and *The Scar*), one novella (*The Last Days of New Paris*) and three short stories ('Säcken', 'Jack' and 'The Familiar'). This chapter contends that xenosomatic degradation's carnivalistic ambivalence—its destruction–regeneration system—enables its users to alter their lives, worlds or both. The thesis's conclusion demonstrates how each of the precursive chapters relate to one another, and how ab-carnivalism and xenosomatic degradation constitute lenses through which to perceive select Miéville fictions as peculiar specimens of carnivalised literature. Moreover, the conclusion specifies how ab-carnivalism and xenosomatic degradation are amenable to serving as fruitful critical tools *vis-à-vis* topics beyond this thesis's purview.

Given the vastness of Miéville's corpus,⁶⁴ I have privileged analyses of his speculative fictions that satisfy a modest criterion: vivid exemplification of ab-carnivalism and xenosomatic degradation. *The Tain* (2002), *The City & The City* (2009), *This Census-Taker* (2016) and *The Book of Elsewhere* (2024) are not discussed because these Miéville fictions, although fascinating in their own right, do not satisfy this criterion to such a degree that their incorporation was justifiable. In accordance with this logic, the bulk of Miéville's short stories and the totality of his independently and co-authored comic books are also absent from the following chapters. My selected Miéville fictions ultimately validate this thesis's core contention: that ab-carnivalism and xenosomatic degradation boast modified, possibility-expanding variants of the paradigms that Bakhtin ascribes to carnival and grotesque realism, thus evincing two ways that Miéville's speculative fictions are peculiar specimens of carnivalised literature.

⁶⁴ At present, Miéville has published ten novels that he alone has authored—*King Rat* (1999), *Perdido Street Station*, *The Scar*, *Iron Council*, *Un Lun Dun*, *The City & The City* (2009) *Kraken*, *Embassytown* (2011) and *Railsea* (2012)—in addition to one of which Keanu Reeves has served as his co-author: *The Book of Elsewhere* (2024). A variegation of short fiction, too, has sprang from Miéville's fecund imagination: three novellas—*The Tain* (2002), *This Census-Taker* (2016) and *The Last Days of New Paris* (2016)—as well as the short story collections *Looking for Jake* (2005) and *Three Moments of an Explosion* (2015). As befits an author for whom experimentation with genre is a marked creative praxis, Miéville's fiction transcends the ambit of the literary: he is a co-writer of the comic book *Hellblazer* #250 (1988) and the sole writer of both the comic book *Justice League* #23.3 (2011) and the graphic novel *Dial H* (2012–2013).

Chapter One: Ab-Carnivalism across Miéville's Fictional Universe

The speculative fictions in Miéville's oeuvre are marked by their engagement with multifarious genres and themes, yet they possess certain narrative tendencies. A commonality between them is that ab-carnivalism's immanent freedom from circumscription by the officially dictated spatiotemporal limits of its extratextual antecedent—Bakhtinian carnival—endows it with subversive utilities. This chapter examines six ab-carnivalisms, each of which belongs to a different Miéville fiction: *Iron Council*, *Perdido Street Station*, *Kraken*, 'Tis the Season', *Un Lun Dun* and *The Scar*. These ab-carnivalisms, it contends, show how ab-carnivalism in general not only accommodates versatile forms of communal mobilisation against oppressive authority figures, but also, as in those of *Un Lun Dun* and *The Scar*, can yield radical change. Ab-carnivalism's Bakhtinian-Miévillean nature, it will become evident, is a protean determinant of the sociopolitical matrices in Miéville's fictional universe.

1. Insurrectionist Puppet Theatre

Puppet theatre, as Peter Schumann puts it, is 'the employment and dance of dolls, effigies, and puppets', representing 'an anarchic art, subversive and untameable by nature'.¹ The sole form of small-scale ab-carnivalism among the identified hexad is that which the Flexible Puppet Theatre—anarchists-entertainers—exercise in *Iron Council* when they perform their anti-government play 'The Sad and Instructional Tale of Jack Half-a-Prayer'. Unfolding in Miéville's secondary world Bas-Lag, this production has been crafted by the Flexibles to publicise their reverence for the long-dead insurrectionist Half-a-Prayer: a Remade, a man with a xenosoma that stems from biothaumaturgy.² In the sprawling city-state of New Crobuzon, biothaumaturgy is a branch of magic often employed to disrupt criminals' bodily wholeness as per magister-prescribed sentences. This sadistic juridical praxis is known as Remaking. In New Crobuzon's subterranean, state-sanctioned punishment factories, the convict-experiences of Remaking are monstrified: in addition to having their appendages or

¹ Peter Schumann, 'The Radicality of the Puppet Theatre', *The Drama Review*, 35 (1991), 75–83 (p. 75).

² Miéville introduces Half-a-Prayer in *Perdido Street Station*. He here makes his only physical appearance when he engages in a gunfight with the Militia.

organs removed, fragments of machinery, animals or other people are implanted in their flesh. Half-a-Prayer's Remaking was relatively modest; his right hand was thaumaturgically amputated, and an oversized mantis claw was grafted to the remaining flesh stump. The convicthood of Remade, as manifested in their warped bodies, relegates them to social lepers, to an underclass that is popularly scorned both within and without New Crobuzon. By cleaving to insurrection, Half-a-Prayer is contrarily beloved by much of the city's commonalty (Chapter Four elaborates on the rationale for this singularity).

The ab-carnivalistic crux of the Flexibles' production is its marriage of fictional elements with a traditional portrayal of the day that Half-a-Prayer met his end twenty years ago. On that day, Half-a-Prayer was shackled to a gargantuan stocks in BilSantum Plaza; the Militia—New Crobuzon's military and police force—had finally apprehended him. The execution of the thaumaturgy-warped convict was imminent, yet it did not transpire in the fashion ordained by New Crobuzon's officialdom. According to the conventional interpretation, Half-a-Prayer's quietus sprang from stray Militia bullets, their target an unidentified, scar-riddled man who approached and hailed him. This man was putatively kin to one of the myriad people slain by the Remade bandit-insurrectionist and, hence, sought to take the law into his own hands. A more recent interpretation is that the cicatricose man was Half-a-Prayer's comrade, and that he enacted a mercy-killing before any Militia bullets were fired (*IC*, p. 55). The Flexible Puppet Theatre's rendition of Half-a-Prayer's fate encompasses ab-carnivalism predicated on a rejection of historicity.

The weightiest specimen of the Flexibles' puppetry-based ab-carnivalism lies in their reimagining of Half-a-Prayer's fate according to their own radical-anarchist politics:

Up the [stocks'] little stairs ran the scarred-man puppet, his weapons outstretched, scooping up the overseer's dropped whip (a complicated arrangement of pins and threads facilitating the movement), as tradition said he had done. [...]

'Why pick up the whip?' the narrator said. [...] 'Iber gotter gun,' said the scarred-man puppet directly to the audience over their rising cries. 'Iber gotter knifey. Whybe gonner pick anubber?'

'I've an idea, pock-boy,' said the narrator.

'Ibey idear already too, see?' the puppet said back. 'One an *dese*,' holding out the gun and the whip, 'tain't fer me, see?' An elegant little mechanism spun the pistol in his wooden hand so that suddenly he held it out butt-first, a *gift* for his tethered friend, and he took his knife to Jack Half-a-Prayer's bonds.

[...] [P]eople [were] standing and shouting *yes, yes, tell it like it is!* Dogged, [...] the Flexible Puppet Theatre continued with their new version of the classic [Half-a-Prayer story], where the two little figures were not doomed or cursed with visions too pure to sustain or beaten by a world that did not deserve them, but were still fighting, still trying to win. (*IC*, p. 56, emphasis in original)

Contained in this passage are a number of disparate ab-carnivalistic eccentricities: the Flexible-actor's exploitation of a puerile register to voice the scarred man-puppet; the Flexible-puppeteers' engenderment of a scene in which the scar-ridden man arms and emancipates Half-a-Prayer, and in which those two men-puppets struggle against New Crobuzon's government³; the audience members' pro-Flexible shout-affirmations. These phenomena qualify as ab-carnivalistic eccentricities because they are unlicensed, theatre-inflected demonstrations of their enactors' fidelity to insurrectionist politics. Indeed, they concretise a communal scorn for the backstage Office of Censorship (OC) agents willing to announce the play defunct, as per stifling, government-ordained criteria. The Flexible Puppet Theatre has generated a popular anti-censorship and, in turn, -authoritarian symbiosis between ab-carnivalistic eccentricity and art.

Immanent in the Flexible-posed brand of anti-historical scene, furthermore, is a potent ab-carnivalistic *mésalliance*. Half-a-Prayer's capture by the Militia, and his pinioning to a whipping post, are, as the preceding account of the day he met his end shows, factual affairs. Puppet-Half-a-Prayer's deliverance from the whipping post, and its subsequent rebellion against New Crobuzon's puppet-government, are unauthorised, seditious fictions. The Flexibles hence give rise to an ab-carnivalistic *mésalliance* of fact and fiction. Until this historicity-rupturing strain of ab-carnivalistic *mésalliance*, their production is marked by a censor-brooked Half-a-Prayer narrative:

like most versions of the story, this [Flexible-performed] one showed him [Half-a-Prayer] as he was remembered: champion-rogue, hero. Jack got caught and it was a sad story, and the censors let the people [in the audience] have it so.
[...]

³ '[T]he popular puppet', observes Cariad Astles, 'is one that traditionally represents the absolute refusal to conform: cousin to the *Commedia zanni*, s/he subverts authority through trickery, ignorance, naivety, or simple blatant insubordination'.³

The story became a grand and vaguely instructional tragedy of hopes noble-but-doomed, and though Jack and his nameless companion were now the heroes, the city's censors allowed it, to the surprise of many. (*IC*, pp. 54–56)

The backstage censors, in other words, relegate the Flexibles' Half-a-Prayer tale to a Bakhtinian carnivalistic eccentricity by licensing its anti-government character. However, the foregoing ab-carnivalistic *mésalliance* of fact and fiction begets their production's metamorphosis into a beyond-the-pale affair:

The master of ceremonies came on[stage], his suit rumpled. He was hurried, almost pushed on by a thin young man – a clerk from the Office of Censorship [...]
'Enough, you have to stop,' shouted the MC and tried to pull the [Flexibles'] puppets away. 'I've been informed, this performance is *over*'. He was shocked out of his pompous patter. [...] [T]he young censor himself stepped up and spoke to the audience.
'This performance is cancelled. This troupe is guilty of Rudeness to New Crobuzon in the Second Degree, and is hereby disbanded pending an enquiry.' [...] 'The militia have been called, and on their arrival, all still here will be deemed complicit with the performance. Please leave the premises immediately.' (*IC*, p. 57)

The Flexibles' fact–fiction ab-carnivalistic *mésalliance* facilitates their dissident artistic liberty by disrupting their unsought participation in Bakhtinian carnivalistic eccentricity. It renders the troupe's counterfactual riff on the well-trodden Half-a-Prayer narrative a genuine and, as such, unattenuated, puissant breach of New Crobuzoner law. Attesting this are the OC clerk's abrupt cancellation of the Flexible Puppet Theatre's production, and his summoning of the Militia: these countermeasures would not be implemented if the performers' ab-carnivalistic *mésalliance* was a mere peccadillo. The Flexibles' ab-carnivalistic *mésalliance* of fact and fiction has proven to be a weighty socio-political affair by imparting to their play a sudden measure of radical illegality.

Amid these developments, a contingent of infuriated Flexibles-supporters among the audience espouse ab-carnivalistic eccentricity. That is, they voice unapprobated objections to the authority of the MC ('they were demanding the show continue') and the OC clerk ('*Fuck you, shame, get off, show must go on*', they say. '*What rudeness? What rudeness?*' (*IC*, p. 57, emphasis in original)). Such ab-carnivalistic eccentricities proceed from their enactors' admiration of the Flexibles' depiction of a Bas-Lag in which Half-a-Prayer's revolutionary insurrection was untruncated. Thus, the web of ab-carnivalistic phenomena that occur when puppet-Half-a-Prayer is liberated from captivity and resumes his struggle against New

Crobuzon's regime are foundational to the audience members' ab-carnivalistic eccentricities. The Flexibles have called forth an ab-carnivalistic species of anti-government interrelationship between performers and audience members. The cancellation of the anarchist troupe's production, along with its elicitation of pro-Flexible, anti-censorship transgressions on the part of select audience members, has exemplified its frustration of reducibility to a playful, inconsequential affair.

By virtue of the Flexibles' partaking in ab-carnivalism, 'The Sad and Instructional Tale of Jack Half-a-Prayer' has both reified insurrectionist dreams and subverted censorship laws. The performers have instantiated the capacity for a fruitful synergy between puppet theatre and ab-carnivalism on behalf of espousing transgressive latitude in an authoritarian society.

2. A Human–Xenian Intervention

The alluded-to ab-carnivalism in *Perdido Street Station* likewise unfolds within the parameters of New Crobuzon, albeit over two decades prior to the Flexibles' play. Boasting hundreds of participants, this ab-carnivalism is far grander than that of the rebellious troupe, casting aside both theatricality and ludic elements in favour of arrant seriousness that befits its agenda. It is an ab-carnivalistic strike implemented by a hundreds-strong gathering of New Crobuzon's resident vodyanoi (that is, batrachian humanoids) employed as stevedores. These vodyanoi, or xenians—Miéville's term for the totality of Bas-Lag's sentient humanoids—adopt strike action because of their subjection to a wage reduction: a consequence of their racial persecution by New Crobuzon's dock authorities.⁴ Occurring by Kelltree Docks, the

⁴ In an interview, Miéville divulges that 'the dock strike by Vodyanoi dockers [in *Perdido Street Station*] is a direct reference to the long-running labour dispute in Liverpool [1995–1998]' (Gordon, 'Reveling in Genre', p. 363). In late September 1995, a cohort of Torside Ltd. dockers subcontracted by the Merseyside Docks and Harbour company (MDHC) to perform a number of indispensable duties were dismissed by Torside's managing director owing to an ill-explained breach of contract (Noel Castree, 'Geographic Scale and Grass-Roots Internationalism: The Liverpool Dock Dispute, 1995–1998', *Economic Geography*, 76 (2000), 272–292 (p. 278)). The dockers sought an explanation for their dismissal by Torside Ltd., only to shortly thereafter be informed that their employer had entered into voluntary liquidation (Castree, 'Geographic Scale and Grass-Roots Internationalism', p. 278). The MDHC repudiated any involvement with, and held that the stevedores' dismissals were the internal affair of, Torside Ltd., thus precluding a resolution (Castree, 'Geographic Scale and Grass-Roots Internationalism', p. 278). On 28 September, the Torside dockers picketed the site at which the preponderance of their contracted MDHC counterparts were based: Seaforth Dock (Castree, 'Geographic Scale and Grass-Roots Internationalism', p. 278). Having refused to cross the picket line, the Seaforth dockers were swiftly dismissed by the MDHC, which procured substitute dockers via a contract with a London-based employer (Castree, 'Geographic Scale and Grass-Roots Internationalism', p. 278). Nearly 500 dockers had been deprived of their jobs within a mere four days (Castree, 'Geographic Scale and Grass-Roots Internationalism', p.

vodyanoi's ab-carnivalistic strike is an attempt to render their newly diminished wages commensurate with those of their human colleagues. "This is far the most serious strike to threaten the city for . . . over a century",⁵ says New Crobuzon's reprobate mayor, Bentham Rudgutter, when he is apprised of its coming. As will become manifest, the affair's qualification as such is inextricable from ab-carnivalism.

Its genesis is a far-reaching permutation of ab-carnivalistic gesture: the vodyanoi's conjuration of a leviathan trench in the River Gross Tar via watercraefing (i.e., the manipulation of water's plasticity and surface tension for creative ends). Performed by Kelltree Docks, under the cover of darkness, this act's ab-carnivalistic character is rooted in its paralysis of New Crobuzon's import-export capabilities:

The channel had been dug a little to the south of Barley Bridge, at the very edge of the docklands. There were ships waiting to enter and ships waiting to leave. A mile or so downstream, in the insalubrious waters between Badside and Dog Fenn, merchant ships reined in their nervous seawyrms and let the boilers run low. In the other direction, by the jetties and landing bays, in Kelltree's fat canals beside the drydocks, the captains from as far as Khadoh gazed impatiently at the vodyanoi pickets that thronged the banks and worried about getting home.

By mid-morning the human wharfmen had arrived to get about the task of unloading and loading. They quickly discovered that their presence was more or less superfluous. Once the remaining work was done preparing those ships still at anchor in Kelltree itself – at most another two days' work – they were stuck. (*PSS*, pp. 360–361)

The vodyanoi's trench-watercraefing is an ab-carnivalistic eccentricity, for it paralyses the city-state's import-export trade absent licence from, and in resistance to, the dock authorities. In doing so, the batrachian people call forth an ab-carnivalistic decrowning and crowning. The dock authorities suffer the former affair: the consummation of the vodyanoi's trench strips the dock authorities of their legitimate faculty for governing Kelltree Docks outright. The vodyanoi, meanwhile, gain an ab-carnivalistic crowning; that is, their watercraefing affords them the power to dictate if and when New Crobuzon's river trade can recommence.

278). Headed by a strike committee, the dockers' ensuing campaign was prodigious: the dispute spanned more than two years. (Castree, 'Geographic Scale and Grass-Roots Internationalism', p. 279). In January 1998, the Seaforth dockers grudgingly accepted a redundancy package; their Torside counterparts received nothing (Castree, 'Geographic Scale and Grass-Roots Internationalism', p. 280).

⁵ China Miéville, *Perdido Street Station* (London: Pan Books, 2011), p. 329. Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text.

The vodyanoi's picketing and use of strike-banners—'FAIR WAGES NOW', and 'NO RAISE, NO RIVER' (*PSS*, p. 360), those protest implements declare—betoken ab-carnivalistic eccentricities: they are unapproved subversions of the dock authorities. Ab-carnivalism has emerged as a viable instrument for coterminously unsettling New Crobuzon's economic system and imparting the humanoid dockers' grievances. It is a remarkable assertion of power on the strikers' part, as it proclaims the fact that their volitional re-establishment of wanted employer–employee relations (i.e., their surrender of the River Gross Tar, their submission to authority) hinges on satisfaction of their demands.

Interracial ab-carnivalism hereafter proceeds from the various methods by which a cohort of humans demonstrate their sympathy toward the hundreds-strong vodyanoi strikers:

At ten in the morning about twenty [human] men [employed as dockers] streamed out of their yards, climbing the fences around the docks, and jogging to the waterfront by the vodyanoi pickets, who cheered them on with something like hysteria. The men pulled out their own signs: HUMAN AND VODYANOI AGAINST THE BOSSES!

They joined in the noisy [vodyanoi] chanting.

[...]

On either bank of the river, in Kelltree itself and on the south bank of Syriac Well, crowds were gathering to watch the confrontation. A few men and women ran among them, moving too fast to be identified, handing out leaflets with the *Runagate Rampant* banner [i.e., the banner of a seditionist newsheet] at the top. They demanded in closely printed text that the human dockers join the vodyanoi, that it was the only way the demands would be won. (*PSS*, pp. 361–362, emphasis in original)

The totality of actions performed by the human dockers, and the distribution of *Runagate Rampant* leaflets by the nearby men and women, are ab-carnivalistic eccentricities. This cannot but be the case: the acts under discussion are extraquotidian, unauthorised repudiations of the dock authorities' maltreatment of the vodyanoi strikers-picketers. The human stevedores and leafleteers, therefore, avail themselves of ab-carnivalistic eccentricities that promulgate interracial solidarity in a decidedly subversive fashion. These collaborating parties of human dockers-strikers and leaflet-distributors conjure a synergism between their own ab-carnivalistic eccentricities and the aforescribed sort effected by the vodyanoi: they interanimate one another. Insofar as it gives rise to a public symbiosis between the racially disparate cohorts of dissidents, ab-carnivalism is fruitful *vis-à-vis* their endeavour to usher in amelioration.

The ab-carnivalistic phenomena employed by the vodyanoi strikers and the human demonstrators allied with them are weighty, albeit unfruitful, transgressions. At Mayor Rudgutter's behest, the New Crobuzon Militia—secret police, in their present incarnation⁶—assault and slay members of the human-xenian coalition. Absent the vodyanoi's sedulous revitalising of its foundations, the great trench in the River Gross Tar is unsustainable; it withers, collapses, and New Crobuzon's river trade resumes. The conservatist reprobacy to which Rudgutter cleaves has engendered the demise of vodyanoi and human ab-carnivalism alike, scotching the realisation of workplace justice. The defeated, crestfallen vodyanoi dockers who survived Rudgutter's ordained Militia intervention reconcile themselves to their wage- and race-inflected persecution. Indeed, they perform their usual labour at Kelltree Docks: 'heav[ing] spilt cargos from the dirty water' and 'direct[ing] ships into tight spaces on the banks' (*PSS*, p. 498). The vodyanoi and human strikers-pickers evince a lamentable truth: ab-carnivalism's capacity for engendering and structuring interracial configurations of anti-official transgression does not render it sufficient to the task of ameliorating workplace discrimination.

'Strikes tend to be interesting and exciting stories', says Miéville in an interview with *Socialist Worker*. 'They are stories of great heroism, humour and sadness'.⁷ The vodyanoi's strike is predicated on heroism within both their ranks and those of the humans who aid them, yet it is, in the end, devoid of humour and steeped in sadness.

3. Familiarity Breeds Contempt

Embedded in Miéville's eschatologies-focused novel *Kraken* is an ab-carnivalistic strike redolent of, but also distinct from, that which has come to naught in *Perdido Street Station*. Here, London's magicked assistants, servants and slaves effect an ab-carnivalism-fuelled strike of far greater magnitude than that of Bas-Lag's vodyanoi and human dockers. Beleaguering London's occult industry, these familiars-strikers repudiate acquiescence to

⁶ During the Bas-Lagian epoch in which *Perdido Street Station* is set, the Militia don their ill-famed uniforms—dark armour, full-face masks—only at times of inordinate crisis, or when serving as guards at some delicate location (*PSS*, p. 324). The Militia metamorphose into chiefly uniformed instruments of state repression during the fragment of Bas-Lagian history that unfolds between *Perdido Street Station* and *Iron Council*.

⁷ 'Kraken: China Miéville Interview', *Socialist Worker*, 18 May 2010 <[Kraken: China Miéville interview - Socialist Worker](#)> [accessed 25 July 2025].

their mage-masters or -mistresses who daily subject them to lamentable working conditions. It bespeaks the waging of ‘[a] class war’ (K, p. 326). The preternatural, manifold enactors of this ab-carnivalistic strike are affiliated with, and hope to secure *quid pro quos* via, the Union of Magicked Assistants (UMA). A cultist—a fanatic belonging to the Church of God Kraken—observes that this familiar-strike is ‘the first big thing since Thatcher’ (K, p. 146): an allusion, no doubt, to the 1984–1985 British miners’ strike that occurred during Margaret Thatcher’s premiership. Initiated in March 1984, the strike encompassed over 150,000 miners who sought to withstand plans for far-reaching pit closures and the attendant loss of industry jobs.⁸ According to Mike Sanders, the miners’ strike was ‘a mode of the carnivalesque’ that transmuted into ‘something more than licensed transgression’: it deviated from the Bakhtinian carnivalesque by virtue of becoming ‘a situation which (from the perspective of the established authorities) [was] capable of spilling out of control’.⁹ In both a tacit and generalised fashion, Sanders here limns an extratextual, historicised modality of the ab-carnivalism with which Miéville’s corpus of fiction pullulates. The familiars’ strike in *Kraken* is a fantastic-inflected cousin to the 1984–1985 British miners’ strike—that is, a bridge between extratextual and intratextual ab-carnivalism.

The UMA-affiliated strikers-familiars exercise ab-carnivalism in manifold fashions. Above all, their strike is an ab-carnivalistic eccentricity, for it is unauthorised by, and repudiates-cum-destabilises the authority of, their masters or mistresses. The same holds true

⁸ Diarmaid Kelliher, *Making Cultures of Solidarity: London and the 1984–1985 Miners’ Strike* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2021), p. 2. A plethora of scholarly writings are dedicated to a rehearsal of the events that inspired and took place during the effectuation of the 1984–1985 British miners’ strike. The thematic and critical frameworks deployed to analyse such events are heterogeneous. Among the works that I have found to be particularly illuminating are Roy A. Church, Quentin Outram and David N. Smith, ‘The Militancy of British Miners, 1893–1986: Interdisciplinary Problems and Perspectives’, *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 22 (1991), 49–66; Martin Adeney and John Lloyd, *The Miners’ Strike, 1984–5: Loss Without Limit* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2022); Peter Gibbon, ‘Analysing the British Miners’ Strike of 1984–5’, *Economy and Society*, 17 (1988), 139–194; Andrew Glyn, ‘Economy and the UK Miners’ Strike’, *Social Scientist*, 13 (1985), 23–31; Ralph Darlington, ‘An *Alterfactual* Methodological Approach to Labor History: The Case of the British Miners’ Strike 1984–1985’, *Labor History*, 55 (2014), 137–150; Katy Shaw, *Mining the Meaning: Cultural Representations of the 1984-5 UK Miners’ Strike* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars); Jonathan Winterton, ‘The 1984–85 Miners’ Strike and Technological Change’, *British Journal for the History of Science*, 26 (1993), 5–14; Florence Sutcliffe-Braithwaite and Natalie Thomlinson, ‘National Women Against Pit Closures: Gender, Trade Unionism and Community Activism in the Miners’ Strike, 1984–5’, *Contemporary British History*, 32, 78–100; Jean Spence and Carol Stephenson, ‘“Side by Side With Our Men?” Women’s Activism, Community, and Gender in the 1984–1985 British Miners’ Strike’, *International Labor and Working-Class History*, 75 (2009), 68–84.

⁹ Mike Sanders, ‘“Alive to Production, Misery, Slavery—Dead to Enjoyment and Happiness”: Humanising (in)Activity in 1842 and 1984/85’, in *Digging the Seam: Popular Cultures of the 1984/5 Miners’ Strike*, ed. by Simon Popple and Ian W. Macdonald, pp. 10–21 (p. 20).

for the familiars’ picketing and interrelated acts of resistance to magi. As with their enactors, these ab-carnivalistic phenomena are multifarious: air elementals whisper-chant ‘*Hell No We Won’t Blow!*’ (*K*, p. 326, emphasis in original)¹⁰; subroutines generate placard-substitutes—‘sculpted grots of background, words in rippling strips’ (*K*, p. 200)—and stage ‘the equivalent of a chanting circle in their facetly iteration of aether’ (*K*, p. 199); a high-ranking flock of birds aid thrall-beetles, ‘chanting alongside what would generally be their prey’ (*K*, p. 157); and as cats tread ‘a complicated quadrille, languidly purposeful’ and ‘dignified’ (*K*, p. 138), nearby pigeons are seen ‘strutt[ing] in their own circle’ (*K*, p. 139). The bird-flock’s and beetles’ chanting evinces ab-carnivalistic familiarity, as it is an anti-sorcerer collaboration that occurs despite their socio-hierarchical disparity. Indeed, it is ‘a powerful symbol of solidarity: some of the strongest hexed assistants in the city feather-to-chitin with some of the weakest’ (i.e., the birds are ‘high-ranking enough to be imbued with considerable portions of their masters’ and mistresses’ clouts’, whereas the beetles are mere ‘ink-carriers, little slave things’ (*K*, p. 157)). The adjacency of these magician-resisting avians and coleopterans is an ab-carnivalistic *mésalliance*, insofar as it unifies ordinarily separated predators and prey. The aforescribed cats’ and pigeons’ circle-walking is tension-fraught ab-carnivalistic familiarity: it is a counter-sorcerer synergy that does not suspend predator–prey tensions. By way of example, the pigeons are ‘startlingly close’ to the felines—‘[t]he paths of the two groups of animals almost overlap[s]’—yet also ‘[f]ar enough away to be safe’ (*K*, p. 139). Since the magi-protesting cats and pigeons are marked by predatorship and preyship, respectively, their closeness emblematises a tension-laden ab-carnivalistic *mésalliance*. The UMA cats-and-pigeons and birds-and-beetles pickets lay bare ab-carnivalism’s accommodation of coalitions between unlike and otherwise inimical animal-familiars. In short, the strikers-picketers exemplify ab-carnivalism’s worthiness to opposing the rampant cruelty of London’s magi and serving as a strategy for quotidian amelioration.

The UMA’s ab-carnivalistic strike is effective insofar as it ‘paralyse[s] large sections of occult industry’ (*K*, p. 180); nevertheless, it fails to call forth recompense. It languishes for different reasons: ‘[t]he grind of economics force[s] some [of its familiar-participants] back

¹⁰ The air-entities’ chant signals Miéville’s riff on what is, to invoke Melvin Small’s words, ‘[t]he most famous slogan of the [Vietnam War] antidraft movement, “Hell No We Won’t Go,” [which] was first heard at an Atlanta SNCC [Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee] protest in August, 1966’ (Melvin Small, *Antiwarriors: The Vietnam War and the Battle for America’s Hearts and Minds*, Vietnam: America in the War Years, I (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, 2002), p. 34).

to work' (*K*, pp. 326–327); there arises scabbing (*K*, p. 326); the preternatural crime boss Tattoo—a sentient tattoo, its man-host a begrudging puppet—orchestrates vicious assaults on the strikers for cash (*K*, p. 327). The UMA's strike-founded ab-carnivalism shortly thereafter meets its end: 'the familiars came back to work, bit by defeated bit, on terrible punitive terms' (*K*, p. 381). However, Miéville-as-author gestures toward a sanguine kind of extratextual future; the shabti-spirit that founded and leads the UMA (Wati, he is called¹¹) will 'start the task of rebuilding the movement again' (*K*, p. 478). The UMA, Miéville divulges, may yet engender a victorious iteration of ab-carnivalistic strike action: familiar-amelioration has not been foreclosed.

The ab-carnivalistic UMA strike is analogous to the sort mobilised by the vodyanoi stevedores in *Perdido Street Station*: although it fails to induce social change, it makes explicit ab-carnivalism's capacity to foster extraquotidian, egalitarian interrelationships between disparate entities that cleave to workplace justice.

4. Toward a Deprivatisation of Christmas

In the dystopian short story 'Tis the Season', Miéville limns a permutation of London-situated ab-carnivalism unlike that which unfolds in *Kraken*. Here, thousands of humans render an extra-*Kraken* London the nexus of ab-carnivalistic struggle for which the basis is their illicit march against YuleCo: the company that has privatised Christmas, that has purloined it, as it were, from the masses. By transcending the aforesaid subjects of puppet theatre and strike action, the forthcoming analysis of 'Tis the Season' reinforces ab-carnivalism's versatility.

The ab-carnivalistic march in Miéville's short story is staged by hundreds of 'radical Christmasarians',¹² by Londoners who aspire to a popular reclamation of Christmas. In 'Tis the Season', dispensation to celebrate Christmas is granted exclusively to YuleCo's

¹¹ In the long-defunct Egyptian afterlife from which he hails, Wati's early existence was marked by oppression: as demanded by the *Book of the Dead*—extract inscribed on his figurine-body, Wati toiled as a serf under deceased lords. He organised the first shabti-effected strike action in the bygone realm.

¹² China Miéville, 'Tis the Season', in *Looking for Jake and Other Stories* (London: Pan Books, 2006), pp. 185–197 (p. 189). Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text.

shareholders and individuals who possess ‘a one-day end-user licence’ (‘TS’, p. 186). All others who wish to lawfully observe Christmas must content themselves with ‘a little MidWinter Event’: a permissible affair, provided that it eschews YuleCo-trademarked wares—i.e., ‘Christmas Tree[s]™’, ‘Holly™’, ‘Mistletoe™’ (‘TS’, p. 186), and so forth. ‘[T]he fines for unlicensed Christmas™ celebrations’, reveals the unnamed narrator-protagonist of Miéville’s short story, ‘are astronomical’ (‘TS’, p. 186). The preceding regulations constitute part of the Christmas™ Act that furnishes YuleCo with a legitimate, unassailable prerogative to deny the masses traditional Christmas celebrations. Violations of the nebulous Christmas™ Code are punishable by arrest (‘TS’, p. 192). The ab-carnivalism that the marching radical Christmasarians exercise is a cathartic resistance to YuleCo’s privatisation laws, its integrant phenomena variegated.

The unlicensed donning of YuleCo-privatised raiment is an ostentatious method by which a cohort of radical Christmasarians indulge in ab-carnivalistic eccentricity. Among their ranks, for instance, is a man who defies YuleCo’s authority by sporting a jumper emblazoned with one of its proprietary images—‘a red-nosed deer’—in an unapproved fashion: ‘I just knew to look at him’, the narrator-protagonist observes, ‘he didn’t have a licence’ (‘TS’, p. 188). Costuming is a further ab-carnivalistic eccentricity implemented by the radical Christmasarians: as befits their jocoserious name, the sNOWMEN (a party of radical feminists) have arrayed themselves in white apparel and carrot-noses; one congregation of ballet dancers masquerade as nutcrackers and sugar-plum fairies (‘TS’, p. 192); the hoodlumite Red-and-White Bloc¹³ members (R&Ws) are garbed as ‘Santa Claus™’ (‘TS’, p.

¹³ The Red-and-White Bloc is a fictional permutation of Black Bloc. A Black Bloc is a variant of collective action in which people wearing black clothes and masks engage in a protest, attempting to explicitly demarcate themselves from the affair’s other members by radically critiquing the current economic and political system (Francis Dupuis-Déri, ‘The Black Blocs Ten Years after Seattle: Anarchism, Direct Action, and Deliberative Practices’, *Journal for the Study of Radicalism*, 4 (2010), 45–82 (p. 46)). This critique is generally expressed via the display of banners emblazoned with anti-authoritarian and anti-capitalist slogans, along with the deployment of flags that bear anarchist colours (black or red and black) or evoke communism by being red *tout court* (Dupuis-Déri, ‘The Black Blocs Ten Years after Seattle’, p. 46). Nevertheless, Black Blocs do occasionally use force to convey their radical critique: at the ‘Battle of Seattle’ on 30 November 1999, a Black Bloc, for example, entered the Movement for Global Justice, smashing the windows of certain shops and banks (Dupuis-Déri, ‘The Black Blocs Ten Years after Seattle’, p. 46). Black Blocs, and the violence that they sometimes embrace, are deeply controversial, receiving condemnation from police, politicians, academics, journalists and mainstream reformist organisations (Dupuis-Déri, ‘The Black Blocs Ten Years after Seattle’, p. 46). As a Black Bloc-counterpart, the Red-and-White Bloc in ‘‘Tis the Season’ ultimately evokes extratextual debates concerning the use of violence to signal radical critiques of economic and political conditions.

193). To put it differently, these disparate protest-groups are complicit in ab-carnivalistic eccentricity owing to the fact that their costumes have been ‘smuggled’ (‘TS’, p. 190) through London’s streets for the anti-YuleCo march. This vein of ab-carnivalistic praxis has enabled the marchers to politicise Christmas garb, to render it a conduit for their fidelity to anti-privatisation radicalism. While garments are no substitute for verbal or tangible rebellion, ab-carnivalism can, the radical Christmasarians reveal, afford it a measure of anti-authority utility.

A popular ab-carnivalistic eccentricity of which the radical Christmasarians avail themselves is the deployment of protest implements. One of those seasonal radicals carries a placard that declaims ‘MUSLIMS FOR CHRISTMAS’ (‘TS’, p. 196); a shabby gathering among them wield placards that boast a photograph of Karl Marx, onto whom they have superimposed a Santa hat; there appears throughout the marchers a placard on which ‘the letters TM [are inscribed] in a red circle, with a line through them’ (‘TS’, p. 190). Among the marchers are Christians who bear crosses, and others—their religion, or lack thereof, is uncertain—who hold banners: ‘FOR PEACE, SOCIALISM AND CHRISTMAS; HANDS OFF OUR HOLIDAY SEASON!; PRIVATISE THIS’ (‘TS’, p. 190). The aforementioned phenomena are ab-carnivalistic eccentricities since they entail an unofficial manipulation of objects to contest YuleCo’s jurisdiction over Christmas. These ab-carnivalistic eccentricities, moreover, foster an inchoate-but-earnest solidarity among the radical Christmasarians by subordinating their ideological differences to, and foregrounding the facticity of, their mutually radical agenda: ushering in YuleCo’s downfall. In a similar manner to their fellows who don Christmas raiment, these protesters’ ab-carnivalistic eccentricity sharpens communal rebellion via wordless transgression.

Contrariwise, the carolling in which a great many radical Christmasarians opt to partake renders the spoken, music-borne word an ab-carnivalistic eccentricity. In the dystopian reality of ‘‘Tis the Season’, carolling is *verboten* for all but YuleCo shareholders and those with a one-day end-user licence (as the narrator-protagonist remarks to his daughter, a benefit of attending ‘a special, licensed Christmas™ party in the centre of London, run by YuleCo itself’, is that they will ‘be able to sing carols legally’ (‘TS’, p. 187)). The protesters who sing ‘We Wish You a Merry Christmas’ despite their absence of a one-day end-user licence exhibit a vein of the ab-carnivalistic eccentricity at issue. To put it otherwise, they wilfully bring

forth an unauthorised, ‘illegal rumpty-tum’ (‘TS’, p. 189) that propagates their objection to YuleCo’s draconian privatisation laws. This marriage of carolling and ab-carnivalistic praxis concurrently serves as a diversion and a species of activism, evincing the rebellious potential of instrument-bereft vocal music.

The Gay Men’s Radical Singing Caucus participate in a remarkable variation of ab-carnivalistic carolling via their rendition of ‘O Little Town of Bethlehem’. A lone Caucusist initiates this carol amid a looming skirmish between Yule Squads—riot-specialist police officers tasked with quelling outlawed Christmas acts—and the R&W Bloc. His singing immobilises the Yule Squads; it prompts them to relinquish their shields and truncheons; it galvanises them into insubordination: ‘One by one,’ recalls the narrator-protagonist, ‘the police removed their helmets and listened. I could hear the frantic squawking of their superiors’ (‘TS’, p. 194). When a number of his comrade-Caucusists appear in a quasi-preternatural fashion and augment his voice with their own, the motionless police officers are rendered ‘smiling and tearful amid a litter of body armour and nightsticks’ (‘TS’, p. 194). The Caucusists’ carolling is an ab-carnivalistic eccentricity on account of its illicit nature and flagrant hostility toward the authorities who enforce YuleCo’s privatisation laws. Insofar as this mollifying performance ruptures the Yule Squads’ adherence to their hierarchical system, it affords both the Caucusists and the hundreds of other radical Christmasarians nearby a victory against officials. The man who originated the Caucusists’ ab-carnivalistic and pacificatory rendition of ‘O Little Town of Bethlehem’ aptly divulges its function to the aforesaid R&Ws:

He declaimed to the Red-and-White Bloc.

‘You should not have tried to fight,’ he said, and they looked ashamed. He waited.

‘You would have been trounced. Whereas *now*,’ he continued, ‘these idiots have disarmed. *Now’s* the time to fight.’ And he swivelled, and en masse, he and his fellow singers launched themselves at the police, their robes flapping.

The helpless cops gaped, turned, ran, and the crowd roared, and began to follow them. (‘TS’, pp. 194–195, emphasis in original)

The Caucusists’ ab-carnivalistic carolling, therefore, is marked by a hitherto-veiled transgressiveness, as it prepares the way for them and their fellow radicals’ capacity to rout the police and coterminously frustrate enforcement of YuleCo’s privatisation laws. Given this marcher-triumph, the Gay Men’s Radical Singing Caucus beget in “‘Tis the Season’ the most

profound demonstration of ab-carnivalistic carolling's suitability to withstanding state-licensed corporate repression on behalf of ameliorative radicalism.

The modification of lyrics emerges as a strategy by which a number of radical Christmasarians transmogrify songs into mediums for ab-carnivalistic eccentricity. Serving as exemplars of this ab-carnivalistic deed are the radical Christmasarians who elect to modify the lyrics of 'Deck the Halls' in accordance with their anti-YuleCo ideology. 'Tis the Season for the Internationale, tra la la la laaaa' ('TS', p. 197, emphasis in original), they sing, their reference to the 'Internationale' endowing the carol with a political character. As Dana L. Cloud and Kathleen Eaton Feyh observe, 'the revolutionary anthem the "Internationale" constructs collective identity, articulates a class-based antagonism, and galvanizes movements specifically faithful to working class experience and interests. Its lyrics and sound have organized collective identity and purpose in struggle across modern history'.¹⁴ The radical Christmasarians' rendition of 'Deck the Halls' marks an ab-carnivalistic eccentricity owing to its altered lyrics—'[t]is the Season for the Internationale'—and unauthorised nature communicating their working-class desire for, and faithfulness to, challenging YuleCo's lawful mastery over Christmas. A corresponding genus of ab-carnivalistic eccentricity materialises among the band of marchers who revise the lyrics of Irving Berlin's song 'White Christmas'. 'I'm dreaming of a red Christmas' ('TS', p. 190), they sing, eschewing the 'white Christmas' lyrics of Berlin's song to exploit the interrelation between the colour red and radical politics. '[W]e all know that red is the colour of the Communist revolution',¹⁵ argues Chris Berry; Simon Cross, meanwhile, observes that 'The Red Flag'—which was composed in 1889 by Jim Connell—is predicated on, and explicitly gives voice to, socialist politics, its *raison d'être* 'to inspire a revolutionary consciousness'.¹⁶ Thus, the protesters' allusion to a 'red Christmas' in their adaptation of Berlin's song is an ab-carnivalistic eccentricity because it reflects their antagonism toward YuleCo while espousing the working class's reclamation of Christmas via revolution. The protesters' ab-carnivalistic

¹⁴ Dana L. Cloud and Kathleen Eaton Feyh, 'Reason in Revolt: Emotional Fidelity and Working Class [sic] Standpoint in the "Internationale"', *Rhetoric Society Quarterly*, 45 (2015), 300–323 (p. 314).

¹⁵ Chris Berry, 'Every Colour Red? Colour in the Films of the Cultural Revolution Model Stage Works', *Journal of Chinese Cinemas*, 6 (2012), 233–246 (p. 235).

¹⁶ Simon Cross, 'The Enduring Culture and Limits of Political Song', *Cogent Arts & Humanities*, 4 (2017), 1–13 (p. 2).

lyric-revision has imparted an extra-recreational utility to both ‘Deck the Halls’ and ‘White Christmas’ by virtue of explicitly politicising them.

‘All music, any organization of sounds’, Jacques Attali contends, ‘is [...] a tool for the creation or consolidation of a community’.¹⁷ The totality of the radical Christmasarians’ aforesaid song-singing positions ab-carnivalistic praxes as a means by which music becomes a tool for both creating and consolidating a transgressive community.

A number of the seasonal radicals avail themselves of ab-carnivalistic chanting that renders police intervention in their march the basis for defying YuleCo. From aboard a helicopter poised above London, a police officer endeavours to quell the marchers’ ab-carnivalism by invoking law: ‘*You are in breach of section 4 of the Christmas™ Code*’, s/he proclaims via a loud-hailer. ‘*Disperse immediately or you will be arrested*’ (‘TS’, p. 192, emphasis in original). A fragment of radical Christmasarians espouse a chant-retort: “‘*Whose Christmas? Our Christmas! Whose Christmas? Our Christmas!*’” (‘TS’, 192, p. emphasis in original). Owing to its illicit, YuleCo-hostile message, this chant is an ab-carnivalistic eccentricity. It propagates its speakers’ unflinching resistance to official intimidation for which the purpose is defending YuleCo’s established stranglehold on Christmas. It makes explicit their radical subordination of the Christmas™ Code—that is, state-sanctioned law—to their antithetical moral code predicated on the article of faith that Christmas belongs to the people, not corporations. The marchers’ ab-carnivalistic chanting reaffirms their commitment to a dissident autonomy, to a structurally inchoate-yet-potent solidarity oriented toward a reclamation of Christmas.

Among the contingents of radical Christmasarians are those whose partaking in ab-carnivalism is ill-received by their activists-peers. An exemplar of this phenomenon arises from the coterie of marchers who vandalise a Selfridges:

‘If they [YuleCo and government officials] won’t give us our Christmas windows,’ one woman [among that cohort] roar[s], ‘we’ll have to provide them ourselves’. And with that, they pulled out hammers. *Oh God*. They took out the glass.

¹⁷ Jacques Attali, *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*, trans. by Brian Massumi (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), p. 6.

‘No!’ I heard a man in a smart wool coat shouting at them [the vandals]. A contingent of the demo was looking horrified, laying down its banners, which read LABOUR FRIENDS OF CHRISTMAS. ‘We all want the same thing here,’ the man shouted, ‘but we can’t support violence!’

But no one was paying him any attention. I waited for people to steal the goods, but they just shoved them out of the way along with the broken glass. They were putting things *into* the windows. From bags and pockets they were taking little creches, papier-mâché Santas™, gaudily wrapped Presents™, Holly™ and Mistletoe™ and they were scattering them, making crude displays. (‘TS’, p. 191, emphasis in original)

The window-shattering and display-crafting are unlawful acts by which their dissident performers publicise their repudiation of acquiescence to YuleCo’s privatisation laws, thereby rendering them ab-carnivalistic eccentricities. The solidarity-rupturing dimension of this ab-carnivalistic vandalism finds expression in its pronounced alienation of the nearby radical Christmasarians who bear witness to it. The dissidents in question cleave to non-violent ab-carnivalistic eccentricity, hence the unsanctioned YuleCo-defiant banners that they wield, that they lay down in horror. To them, the window-smashing is beyond the pale, subordinating mass political unity to selective catharsis and pleasure: it deviates from righteous ab-carnivalistic eccentricity. Elsewhere, R&W faithfuls endeavour to ignite a clash between themselves and the Yule Squads by ‘smashing car windscreens’ and ‘chucking bottles, screaming, “Come on then!” like pissed-up Football™ fans’ (‘TS’, p. 193). Each of these acts are ab-carnivalistic eccentricities, for they are non-approved transgressions that contest YuleCo’s quasi-monopoly of Christmas via their flagrant opposition to some of its chief enforcers—to the Yule Squads. This amalgam of ab-carnivalistic vandalism and bellicosity on the R&Ws’ part is controversial, eliciting a popular disdain from other radical Christmasarians: “‘Fuck,” muttered someone [among the former group]. “It’s the Red-and-White Bloc.” It was obvious the R&Ws were out for trouble. Everyone else in the crowd tried to draw away from them. “Piss off!” I heard someone shouting, but they paid no attention’ (‘TS’, p. 193). The Selfridges-vandals and R&Ws instantiate that ab-carnivalistic eccentricity can be rendered a puissant conduit for opposing YuleCo, albeit in a problematic manner. The ab-carnivalistic conduct of both *galères* occurs at the expense of solidarity with radical Christmasarians beyond themselves, thus undercutting its communal spirit.

The terminus of the radical Christmasarians’ ab-carnivalistic march against YuleCo, and whether it has any bearing on, or gives rise to, the amelioration for which its participants hanker, lies beyond the ken of those who read “‘Tis the Season’. Nonetheless, this radical

modality of wintertime ab-carnivalism is attended by a definitive lasting change *vis-à-vis* the narrator-protagonist: it inspires a reformulation of his politics. He is initially dismayed by the Yuletide activists-criminals, rebuking them for what he perceives to be their misguidedness: ‘These people were crazy!’ he opines. ‘It wasn’t that I didn’t think their hearts were in the right places, but this was no way to achieve things. All they were going to do was bring down trouble on everyone’ (‘TS’, p. 190). The conclusion of ‘‘Tis the Season’ is marked by the narrator-protagonist’s acknowledgement of a departure from his erstwhile political convictions: ‘I thought of everything that had happened that day, and of my reactions’, he illustratively divulges. ‘Everything I’d been through and seen—been a *part* of. I realised how different I felt now than I had that morning. It was an astonishing revelation’ (‘TS’, p. 197, emphasis in original). Despite his passive and begrudging part in the radical Christmasarians’ march, ab-carnivalism has ostensibly awakened him to the virtues of—and, at a minimum, has unquestionably tempered his aversion toward—illicit modes of anti-YuleCo rebellion. Ab-carnivalism has thus accomplished more than a mere contestation of YuleCo’s privatisation-rooted authority. In a small-yet-remarkable victory, this Bakhtinian–Miévillean affair has potentially both radicalised the narrator-protagonist and moulded him into a future ab-carnivalite.

In their totality, the quartet of ab-carnivalisms that have thus far been dissected—those belonging to *Iron Council*, *Perdido Street Station*, *Kraken* and ‘‘Tis the Season’, respectively—foreground ab-carnivalism’s power to serve as a methodologically and communally adaptable method of anti-authority phenomenon. Excepting the Flexible Puppet Theatre, each of the hitherto-discussed social groups that engage in ab-carnivalism endeavour, yet ultimately fail, to bring forth ameliorative change. By doing so, they exhibit a core determinant of ab-carnivalism at large: its pragmatic, Miévillean susceptibility to functioning as a transgressive affair that ultimately cannot engender its participants’ defeat of established authority figures. This does not, however, undercut the subversive merits of ab-carnivalism; it remains a sociopolitically sharpened and, hence, consequential alternative to Bakhtinian carnival.

5. The Virtues of Polysemy: Recalcitrant Words

In Miéville's young adult novel *Un Lun Dun*, a fruitful vein of revolt-structured ab-carnivalism arises with respect to certain inhabitants of the city styled UnLondon: the autocratic entity Mr Speaker and the sentient word-creatures born from his utterances. Known as utterlings, these word-things' obedience to Mr Speaker is absolute owing to them accepting his fallacious conviction that he alone dictates the meaning of words. Deeba—a visitor to UnLondon, a girl who embarks on a self-chosen quest to forestall the city's ruination by the malevolent Smog—catalyses the referenced ab-carnivalistic revolt. She does so by way of utilising *parrhesia*, as formulated by Michel Foucault.

According to Foucault, the *parrhesiastes*—the practitioner of *parrhesia*—eschews any modality of rhetoric that would veil their thoughts: they exercise discourse by which they open their heart to whomever they speak.¹⁸ Unlike the rhetorician, the *parrhesiastes* influences the minds of the individual/s to whom they speak by telling them that which they believe, as directly as possible (*FS*, p. 12). The *parrhesiastes* stresses that they are voicing their own belief/s; as Foucault puts it, ‘The specific “speech activity” of the parrhesiastic enunciation thus takes the form: “I am the one who thinks this and that”’ (*FS*, p. 13). *Parrhesia*, moreover, is discourse in which belief and truth are inextricable: ‘the *parrhesiastes* says what is true because he *knows* that it *is* true; and he *knows* that it is true because it is really true’ (*FS*, p. 14, emphasis in original). An interrelated presupposition about the *parrhesiastes* is their possession of moral traits by which they can both register the truth and impart it to others (*FS*, p. 14). Foucault stipulates that a *parrhesiastes* qualifies as such only if the truth that they express lays them open to danger (*FS*, pp. 15–16). *Parrhesia* is an instrument of criticism that may be levelled at the *parrhesiastes* themselves or their interlocutor/s, and the former is invariably subordinate to the latter. That is, ‘*parrhesia* comes from “below,” as it were, and is directed [...] “above”’ (*FS*, p. 18). The final hallmark of *parrhesia* is its correlation between liberty and duty. Indeed, the *parrhesiastes*, Foucault argues, voluntarily criticises a socio-hierarchically elevated figure despite the risk/s to which it exposes them, on behalf of a personal and communal moral duty oriented toward some

¹⁸ Michel Foucault, *Fearless Speech*, ed. by Joseph Pearson (Los Angeles, CA: Semiotext(e), 2001), p. 12. Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text.

manner of amelioration (*FS*, p. 19). At bottom, the *parrhesiastes* volitionally engages in frank, dangerous and amelioration-gearred criticism of a higher-ranking individual or people owing to a sense of moral duty.

Deeba's denunciation of Mr Speaker's self-avowed entitlement to govern the utterlings signals her engagement in *parrhesia*:

'A PROMISE IS WORDS. I'M MR SPEAKER! WORDS MEAN WHATEVER I WANT. WORDS DO WHAT I TELL THEM!'¹⁹

'I don't think that's true,' she said.

Silence settled, and all the eyes in the room turned to Deeba.

'WHAT?' Mr Speaker said.

'Well,' said Deeba, 'I don't think words do what anyone tells them all the time.'

[...]

'The thing is, ' Deeba said, eyeing Mr Speaker, 'you could only make words do what you want if it was just you deciding what they mean. But it isn't. It's everyone else too. Which means you might want to give them orders, but you aren't in total control. No one is.'

'THIS IS OUTRAGEOUS NONSENSE!' Mr Speaker spluttered, burping four confused creatures, but Deeba interrupted him.

'So you might think all these words [the utterlings] have to obey you. But they don't.'

'NO MORE SPEAKING! UTTERLINGS, TAKE HER AWAY!'

The utterlings were staring at Deeba, absolutely still, their eyes enormous. None of them moved. Mr Speaker's face went dark purple with rage.

'UTTERLINGS!' he shrieked.

'Even *your* words don't always do what you want,' Deeba said. (*ULD*, pp. 296–298, emphasis in original)

Deeba here serves as a *parrhesiastes* by frankly criticising Mr Speaker's neglect of the fact that polysemy cannot but render his presumed monopoly on word-meaning erroneous. Deeba's words, furthermore, capture *parrhesia* because they have arisen from below, as it were: she is a child bereft of sociopolitical capital, yet she expresses to Mr Speaker a

¹⁹ Miéville here riffs on Humpty Dumpty's declamation of semantic mastery in Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking-Glass* (1871): his sequel to *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865). "When I use a word," Humpty Dumpty said [to Alice] in a rather scornful tone, "it means just what I choose – neither more nor less" (Lewis Carroll, *Through the Looking-Glass*, in *Alice in Wonderland* (Ware: Wordsworth Editions, 1995), pp. 105–161 (p. 130, emphasis in original)). In an interview with *GeekChocolate*, Miéville offers a pertinent exposition of the correspondence between Carroll's *Alice* duology and *Un Lun Dun*: 'the *Alice* books are massive books to me, and particularly [*Through the*] *Looking Glass* [*sic*]. I love them both [...] Definitely [,] I wanted to write [*Un Lun Dun*] as a kind of collapsed industrial *Alice*, very much' (Michael Flett, 'China Miéville – Award Winning [*sic*] Novelist of the New Weird', *GeekChocolate*, 1 October 2012 <<https://geekchocolate.co.uk/china-mieville-award-winning-novelist-of-the-new-weird/>> [accessed 28 June 2025]).

dissident belief-truth in the portion of UnLondon that he rules—the Talklands. Deeba does so while being restrained by a legion of utterlings, for Mr Speaker has proclaimed that she will henceforth be his prisoner and tutor him in London slang. Deeba surely recognises that her words endanger her further, that they may prompt Mr Speaker to impose on her a fate worse than that which he has already ordained. This affords them a parrhesiastic character—that is, it substantiates her role as a *parrhesiastes*. The sentiments that Deeba voices betoken *parrhesia*, too, by satisfying a moral duty: revealing the utterlings’ polysemy-based faculty for anti-sovereign autonomy. Deeba’s *parrhesia* is a method of exposing deficiencies in Mr Speaker’s convictions regarding both language and the tenability of his established rule over the utterlings. With a shrewdness that far exceeds her years, Deeba manipulates *parrhesia* to publicly undercut Mr Speaker’s fallacious potentate-logic and empower his word-subjects.

In the wake of Deeba’s revelatory, parrhesiastic intervention, the utterlings become ‘rebellious’ and ‘renegade’ (*ULD*, p. 298) subjects by way of ab-carnivalism. A contingent of the word-creatures deploy ab-carnivalistic eccentricity by flouting Mr Speaker’s restated order to imprison Deeba—a flagrant subversion of his hitherto-uncontested authority—and by ‘bearing down on him’ in response to her seditious declaration, “‘I bet you could shut him up’” (*ULD*, p. 298). The ensuing clash between the radical utterlings and the reactionaries that ‘st[an]d protectively before him’ (*ULD*, p. 298) gives rise to an unprecedented, unlawful and ephemeral amalgam of counterposed ideologies: an ab-carnivalistic *mésalliance*. The insolent words best Mr Speaker via ab-carnivalistic eccentricity: they overwhelm their master-creator, gagging him to thwart his summoning of a retaliatory force (*ULD*, 298–299). The word-things here engender an ab-carnivalistic decrowning; that is, they forcibly deprive Mr Speaker of his reign over them by reducing him to a detainee and, thus, a non-personage. These utterlings simultaneously emerge as the recipients of an ab-carnivalistic crowning, in that now, for the first time in their existence, they boast the faculty of self-governance. The turncoat-utterlings hereafter treat Deeba and her fellow questers—a boy-wraith and a sentient, vaticinal book—with nonofficial deference that proclaims ab-carnivalistic eccentricity: ‘A while after the utterlings had subdued their speaker, they had ceremoniously ushered Deeba and her companions to sleeping quarters and given them supper, all with exaggerated bows. [...] They had [later] showed them out [of Mr Speaker’s abode] with pomp and politeness’ (*ULD*, p. 299). This development marks a

further, interrelated brand of ab-carnivalistic decrowning—crowning, for Mr Speaker’s downfall elevates the questing triumvirate to quasi-nobility. A band of rogue utterlings ‘silently squabbl[e]’ among themselves amid ‘attempt[s] to organize things’ (*ULD*, p. 299), thus employing vexatious-but-fruitful ab-carnivalistic eccentricity that reflects the possibility of, and their commitment to, neoteric lives. The utterlings’ ab-carnivalism instantiates the autonomy- and transgression-oriented possibilities that lie at the heart of Deeba’s participation in *parrhesia*. The word-entities’ unveil the radical merits of a symbiosis between *parrhesia* and Bakhtinian-Miévillian carnivalism.

While the utterlings’ impromptu ab-carnivalistic rebellion against Mr Speaker serves to reconfigure their lives for the better, it lacks an uncomplicatedly buoyant conclusion. The sapient, prophesying book that succours Deeba in her battle against the Smog illustratively gestures toward the potential limitations of the word-things’ triumph:

‘Might not last,’ the book muttered. ‘The smaller ones’ll [i.e., the smaller utterlings will] ebb and disappear before long. Mr Speaker’ll be trying to whisper new ones all the time and he’ll try to talk more loyal ones into existence. And there must be some who want to get back to obeying him, waiting for the right moment. . .’ (*ULD*, p. 299)

The Book here imparts a disquieting truth: the renegade utterlings’ ab-carnivalism has begotten a valuable, albeit potentially-short-lived, banishment of Mr Speaker’s rule. To put it otherwise, Miéville renders the Book’s pessimism an instrument for satisfying his anti-consolatory and -Tolkienian approach to fiction, as delineated in the Introduction. Indeed, the utterling victory has not smoothed over everyday tensions; rather, it has altered them in such a fashion that they do not, as they once did, disempower the word-creatures. The coda with which Miéville furnishes the utterlings’ ab-carnivalistic revolt neither embraces nor disavows the possibility of lasting ameliorative change unfolding in an UnLondon beyond the purview of his Deeba-centric narrative.

The utterlings’ newly reoriented lives and futures are contingent on an exploitation of the radical possibilities that attend a marriage of *parrhesia* and ab-carnivalism. The parrhesiastic voice, as exercised by Deeba, enables the utterlings’ ab-carnivalism to eclipse the officialdom-dictated and, hence, unradical, status quo—preserving socio-hierarchical reconfigurations conjured by Bakhtinian carnival.

6. A Maritime Affair: Piratical Discord

The Scar holds a manifestation of ab-carnivalism that entails a radical, unambiguously productive interplay between its Bakhtinian-Miévillean workings and *parrhesia*. This specimen of ab-carnivalism occurs within the sprawling bounds of Armada. Built atop hundreds of tethered ships from variegated Bas-Lagian epochs, Armada is ‘a colony of the lost, the renegade, the absent without leave, the defeated’ (*S*, p. 594). It is a vagabond, piratical genus of flotilla-city that boasts an efficient bureaucracy and, despite its entrenched system of press-ganging, a constructive quasi-egalitarianism.²⁰ Its inhabitants are apportioned among ridings: ‘weird little femto-states clamped together in unhealthy congregation, resenting each other and manoeuvring for position’ (*S*, p. 144). The man and woman who style themselves the Lovers by virtue of their romantic involvement reign over what has ‘always been the strongest’ (*S*, p. 268) of Armada’s ridings—Garwater—and, thus, in a *de facto* manner, the ship-city at large.

The ab-carnivalism at issue begins shortly after these diarchs announce that they have manoeuvred Armada into a quest for the Scar: a putative species of leviathanic interdimensional tear that pullulates with all manner of reified possibilities.²¹ The He- and She-Lover are bent on harnessing the Scar’s puissance by means of implementing the bygone, esoteric science possibility mining. Doing so, they believe, will transfigure Armada into ‘a dynamo powered by potentiality, [a ship-city] able to do anything – able to do contradictory things, at once’ (*S*, p. 731). The cacatacae (i.e., cactus humanoid) Hedrigall, a widely esteemed aeronaut among Armada’s population, objects to the Lovers’ esoteric

²⁰ The preponderance of Armada’s considerable population have been press-ganged into citizenship: they were once crewmates, passengers or prisoners of despoiled vessels. Newly press-ganged individuals who spurn Armadan citizenship are incarcerated and subjected to re-education until they do so, at which point their liberty is reinstated. Any person on whom such re-education ultimately does not yield acceptable results is deemed a threat to Armada’s security; they are dealt with in an unspecified fashion. Having successfully been press-ganged into Armada, an individual—an emergent Armadan—is forbidden from resettling anywhere beyond its limits. Armada’s quasi-egalitarian character is instantiated by its culture’s commitment to repudiating socio-hierarchical distinctions between humans, xenians and Remade.

²¹ In an interview with Bould, Miéville explains that he ‘wanted [...] to write an anti-quest’ in *The Scar*: ‘Quests are a very strong tradition in fantasy,’ he continues, ‘and I wanted to take a lot of the structural tropes of the quest and undermine them at every step’ (Bould, ‘Appropriate Means’). Farah Mendlesohn rightly contends that ‘*The Scar* is an anti-quest novel’ because ‘[w]e are set up, time and time again, to expect that something will be found, a hero identified, a mission launched. And each time we are denied’ (Farah Mendlesohn, *Rhetorics of Fantasy* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2008), p. 58).

governance of late. He decamps Armada as it traverses the Hidden Ocean *en route* to the Scar, only to shortly thereafter be found adrift, clinging to the remnants of his airship. The Lovers shepherd Hedrigall into the *Grand Easterly*—Garwater’s flagship—to isolate him from an overwrought, inquisitive public. He is therein interrogated by the co-rulers, imparting to them a purportedly first-hand narrative of Armada’s arrival at, and extirpation by, the Scar. Ostensibly, this is a Hedrigall who hails from a divergent (or counterfactual) Bas-Lag, his appearance traceable to the legions of Scar-possibilities that filter into the Hidden Ocean. Scorning his prodigious tale as naught but ‘seditious shit’ (*S*, p. 760), the She-Lover determines that she and her He-analogue are best served by suppressing it. Both Tanner Sack and Bellis Coldwine—the New Crobuzoner Remade and linguist, respectively, who operate as the co-protagonists of *The Scar*—have eavesdropped on Hedrigall’s fey narrative from a cubbyhole belowdecks. Tanner and Hedrigall are friends; he judges the cactacae’s story to portend the factual Armada’s devastation by the Scar, thus publicising it against the Lovers’ wishes. When their incredulity gives way to belief and fear-inflected wrath, a horde of Armada’s commonalty resolve to terminate their ship-city’s damned quest for the world-wound. They do so by staging the aforescribed ab-carnivalistic mutiny inflected by *parrhesia*.

This maritime ab-carnivalism into which Tanner’s revelation—or, to put it differently, Hedrigall’s tale—galvanises the Armadans is manifested in several fashions. ‘Scores [of the Lovers’ now-disaffected citizens] lined up like a ragged army: hotchi and cactacae among the humans, even the Garwater llogriss’ (*S*, p. 764). These Armadans’ lay bare their disdain for the Lovers’ rule via an unapproved and belligerent spectacle, hence exploiting ab-carnivalistic eccentricity. This piratical congregation is informed by ab-carnivalistic familiarity: while quasi-egalitarianism is a given among Armadans, the fellowship proclaimed by these racially disparate city dwellers is predicated on untrammelled, non-sanctioned dissidence. Tanner assumes a *de facto* position of authority by which engages in, and provokes communal manifestations of, ab-carnivalistic eccentricity:

He moved forward, and the mass [of disaffected Armadans] moved up behind him, shuffling, determined.

‘Jaddock,’ Tanner shouted, ‘CorSCALL, GuDDRUNN, you lot, go find Hedrigall. He’s down there [i.e., in the *Grand Easterly*] somewhere. Bring him out here’. A group of

cactacae stepped forward nervously towards the Lovers and Uther Doul [the co-rulers' bodyguard], and the door behind them.

'*Stop!*' shouted the [She-] Lover. The cactacae halted, and looked to Tanner. He moved forward, and the crowd came with him. Boldened, the cactus-people moved on. (*S*, p. 765, emphasis in original)

The forward movement of Tanner and the hundreds-strong Armadan gathering that flanks him are unlicensed gestures founded on a defiance of the He- and She-Lover's rule. As such, they are ab-carnivalistic eccentricities. Here, too, both the Armadans rallied behind Tanner and the cactacae trio with whom he charges the liberation of Hedrigall—Jaddock, Corscall and Guddrunn—register their complicity in ab-carnivalistic eccentricity owing to their treatment of Tanner as a loftier authority figure than the Lovers despite him being a mere diver-engineer. The cactacae's disobedience of the She-Lover's command and their fulfilment of that which Tanner counteractively issues signals illegitimate authority's eclipsing of its inverse. The commonfolk's ab-carnivalism thus far is a wordless-yet-lucid manifestation of their devotion to challenging the Lovers' attempted suppression of Hedrigall's tale. Ab-carnivalism has become a potential conduit for longevity, a stepping stone to circumventing the Armadans' putatively imminent deaths by way of the Scar.

Tanner's face-to-face diatribe against the He- and She-Lover is a noteworthy affair since it entails *parrhesia* that also constitutes a vein of ab-carnivalistic eccentricity:

'What more could you ask?' said Tanner, his voice hard. You've been shown what'll happen to us. But you're so fucking insane with this [quest for the Scar], so fucking caught up in it, that you'd ignore *this*? You still want to go on.

'And you'd keep this quiet from us, you'd *lie* to us, let us drive ourselves, mute and stupid as the fucking *avanc* [the aquatic beast that hauls Armada], over the edge. [...]

[...] We've come so far with you, and you were going to lie to us about this. Because you're so blinded by some greed you couldn't risk us facing you down. You know nothing about the Scar', he shouted. '*Nothing*. Don't tell me coincidence, don't tell me unbelievable – maybe this is how it *works*. You don't even know.

'All we know is that one of the best fucking Garwater men I ever knew [Hedrigall] is down in your jail, warning us that if we go to the Scar we'll die. And I believe him. (*S*, pp. 766–767, emphasis in original)

Tanner here utilises *parrhesia* by frankly criticising i) the Lovers' disregard of Hedrigall's perhaps prognosticatory narrative; ii) their willingness to conceal it from Armada's commonalty, to engage in mendacity-by-omission; iii) and their ongoing dedication to

seeking out the Scar despite them being uncertain how it operates. Tanner's manipulation of *parrhesia*, moreover, is reflected by him imparting to the Lovers that which he believes to be true—i.e., their selfishness, their possibly deleterious rulership, the veracity of Hedrigall's tale—while exposing himself to punishment at their behest. Tanner's deployment of *parrhesia* is further evinced by the manner in which his truth-founded criticism of the He- and She-Lover arises from below, as it were, due to his humble background: as a diver-engineer and Garwater citizen, he is subject to the Lovers' rule. Tanner's words are *parrhesia* since they fulfil both a private and communal moral duty. Stated otherwise, his candid criticism marks a deliberate endeavour to aid Armada's commonalty by propagating their anger at, and refusal to brook, the Lovers' conduct. Tanner's *parrhesia* is an ab-carnivalistic eccentricity because it is non-approbated and publicly conveys his objection to the Lovers' time-hallowed reign over Armada. He renders *parrhesia* an instrument for ab-carnivalistic transgression, hence illustrating, as Deeda does in *Un Lun Dun*, the synergetic possibilities between these phenomena. Tanner's parrhesiastic and ab-carnivalistic conduct weaponises Hedrigall's uncorroborated-yet-accepted account of Armada's Scar-born devastation to destabilise the Lovers' authority.²²

Tanner gives rise to another specimen of *parrhesia* that doubles as ab-carnivalistic eccentricity. Its origin is his denouncement of the bellicosity manifested by the Lovers' protector, the philosopher-warrior Uther DouL:

we are fetching Hedrigall up here, [Tanner informs DouL,] and if you threaten them,' he indicated the cactacae [Jaddock, Corscall and Guddrunn], 'then the rest of us are coming with them, and you threaten all of us. Think you can take us all? Shit, maybe

²² At no juncture in *The Scar* does Miéville cast a light on whether Hedrigall's prodigious narrative is authentic. Rather, he expounds three possibilities germane to it. The first postulates that Hedrigall is naught but a deceiver, that he is—contrary to appearances—the same cactacae who putatively absconded from Armada of late. Uther DouL is here envisaged as a furtive dissident who aided Hedrigall in feigning a departure from Armada by untethering the cactacae's aerostat and then sequestering him somewhere in the city itself, ultimately ensuring that he was thereafter pseudo-stumbled-on adrift in the Hidden Ocean (*S*, pp. 787–788). According to this possibility, Hedrigall gave the Lovers a faux eyewitness account of Armada's annihilation by the Scar—one that DouL intended Bellis to hear and disseminate because doing so would inspire a mutiny. The second possibility is that Hedrigall has told the truth. In this scenario, the Armada that he claims was obliterated by the Scar existed in an alternative, counterfactual Bas-Lag: the one from which he hails (*S*, p. 788). The third possibility is that DouL used a perhapsadian—an archaic instrument—to orchestrate the events that gave rise to the Armadan mutiny (*S*, pp. 788–789). 'In an aether rich in potentiality, a [perhapsadian] virtuoso', DouL remarks to Bellis, 'could play particular facts and nighs into existence – choose certain outcomes' (*S*, p. 548). None of the foregoing possibilities must be accepted or disavowed.

you can, maybe you can. But if you fucking do . . . what then? Who are your bosses going to rule?’ (*S*, pp. 765–766, emphasis in original)

Tanner employs *parrhesia* by frankly criticising Doul’s ostensible neglect of the incontrovertible fact that slaying him and his fellows would terminate the Lovers’ rule. Tanner’s words, furthermore, represent *parrhesia* by virtue of his socio-hierarchical inferiority to the exalted Doul: here is the disproportion of subject–object power that *parrhesia* demands (i.e., its emergence from below, its upward trajectory). The parrhesiastic character of Tanner’s uttered sentiments finds expression, too, in his recognition that he risks suffering a Lovers-ordained execution at the hands of Doul. They instantiate *parrhesia* because their telos is the satisfaction of a popular moral obligation—that is, Hedrigall’s deliverance from captivity in the *Grand Easterly*. Tanner’s iron-willed engagement in *parrhesia* is a method by which he undercuts the ordinarily uncontested authority that Doul wields: it is an ab-carnivalistic eccentricity. The ab-carnivalistic *parrhesia* under discussion exploits the fact that Tanner and his fellow pirates effectively hold greater power than the He- and She-Lover insofar as their lives are indispensable to his and her faculty for continued rulership.

Tanner’s ab-carnivalistic *parrhesia* ultimately elicits from Doul a reaction attended by additional, momentous iterations of ab-carnivalistic phenomena:

Uther Doul looked from Tanner to the masses behind him, back to Tanner again. And then he showed weakness, his command broke, he hesitated and turned his head. Uncertain, he turned, to look to his bosses [the Lovers], to seek clarification. His shoulders moved in a minuscule shrug; he tilted his head in a question: *He’s right, what do you want me to do, do you want me to kill them all . . . ?*

When he turned like that, when he showed doubt, Tanner won. He moved his hand again, and the cactacae [Jaddock, Corscall and Guddrunn] moved past Doul and the Lovers and into the corridor, setting out to find Hedrigall, uneasy but not afraid, knowing that they would be safe. (*S*, p. 766, emphasis in original)

Doul’s hesitation and gesticulated clarification-seeking betoken a disruption of the established, outwardly unquestioned chain of command *vis-à-vis* himself and the Lovers. They are deeds that unofficially dispossess the diarchs of their capacity to intimidate Armada’s resentful commonfolk, hence functioning as an ab-carnivalistic decrowning. These pirates-turncoats experience an ab-carnivalistic crowning bespoke by their unsanctioned and,

given Doul's passivity, unbridled vein of anti-Lover independence. The facticity of Jaddock, Corscall and Guddrunn obeying Tanner's hand gesture to recommence their search for Hedrigall registers this socio-hierarchical shift: they do so unafraid, for they now wield illegitimate-yet-greater power than their co-rulers. 'We say what happens now', Tanner informs the She-Lover. 'We're taking control. We're turning [Armada] round, we're heading home. Your orders to proceed . . . are *in-fucking-validated*. You can't jail or kill us all' (*S*, pp. 767–768, emphasis in original). In response to Tanner's assertion, the masses vocalise their support for him: they 'sporadically [...] chant *Sack Sack Sack*' (*S*, p. 768, emphasis in original). Both Tanner's declamation and the swell of comradely cheers that it inspires are reaffirmations of a commitment to disrupting the He- and She-Lover's time-hallowed stranglehold on deciding Armada's fate; they are ab-carnivalistic eccentricities. The foregoing succession of ab-carnivalistic phenomena establish—or, stated otherwise, contribute to consummating the hitherto-looming approach of—the Lovers' downfall. By doing so, they nurture a popular *esprit de corps* and, above all, realise the telos of Tanner's ab-carnivalistic *parrhesia*: an end to the diarchs' quest for the Scar.

Given the uncertainty of Hedrigall's tale, one cannot assert that these ab-carnivalistic interventions have saved Armada from the doom that Hedrigall describes. Inasmuch as Tanner and his fellow mutineers are convinced that it has accomplished precisely this, ab-carnivalism has, nonetheless, proven to hold an immense social utility.

Hedrigall is eventually located and brought onto the main deck of the *Grand Easterly*. The cactus-man is 'greeted with a wave of welcoming joy' (*S*, p. 770) from mutinous Armadans who indulge in 'danc[ing] and shout[ing] and call[ing] his name' (*S*, p. 770). Miéville designates the resultant phenomenon a 'carnival' (*S*, p. 771). By doing so, he acknowledges that carnivals—as the present thesis contends, and has now demonstrated on six occasions—are not invariably Bakhtinian. Miéville here uses the term 'carnival' to limn a non-approved celebration of the Lovers' deposition: he implicitly acknowledges the pirates' ab-carnivalistic eccentricity. As demonstrated by the recent actions of both Tanner and those who support him, ab-carnivalism has materialised a great deal sooner than Miéville's reference to 'carnival'. Miéville here frames ab-carnivalism as a mode of unlicensed communal transgression marked by gaiety: something that, until Hedrigall's liberation, has, according to my own analyses of ab-carnivalism, been absent. This is not to say that Miéville would, in an

extratextual sense, view my notion of ab-carnivalism, or something that approaches its equivalent, as inherently buoyant. Miéville's use of the term 'carnival' is a valuable exemplification of ab-carnivalism's conceptual flexibility, of its irreducibility to a single interpretation with regard to its beginnings (and, in turn, its endings). For my part, Hedrigall's emancipation from the bowels of the *Grand Easterly* nurtures the ab-carnivalism engendered by Tanner and his comrades, ushering in a milieu that accommodates their exercising of unprecedented anti-authoritarian liberty.

There hereafter unfolds a full-fledged mutiny and a concomitant proliferation of ab-carnivalistic eccentricities. The mutineers avail themselves of various ab-carnivalistic eccentricities: one cohort 'turn[s] the winches that tugged at the avanc's reins', steering Armada out of the Hidden Ocean; as the ship-city returns to familiar waters, the totality of rebels fracture the status quo in Garwater by embracing self-governance—that is, '[t]here was no chain of command, no order, no hierarchy, nothing but a rugged, contingent democracy thrown together by the Armadans as they needed it' (*S*, p. 772); some among their number activate the flares that signal the city's winch-boats, thus yielding 'a big vulgar display', 'a celebration and a defiance – we do not need these anymore, the mutineers [are] saying' (*S*, p. 774). These developments are ab-carnivalistic eccentricities, as they are predicated on, and specimens of, the nascent anti-Loverism espoused by Armada's commonalty. The mutineers' ab-carnivalism, furthermore, is notable because it inspires a radical suspension of their city's established socio-hierarchical praxis: 'The authority that kept Garwater in control, and spread beyond that to assert its will on all Armada, is gone. [...] The rulers [the He- and She-Lover] have disappeared, and their integument of law and control, their yeomanry and their authority, have gone with them' (*S*, pp. 772–773). This is not all. The pirates' ab-carnivalistic mutiny fractures socio-hierarchical systems beyond Garwater: 'The rulers of the other ridings', Bellis divulges, 'have wisely remained silent and hidden. It would not work for them to try to take control of this, this popular rage and exhilaration. They are not so stupid as to try' (*S*, p. 773). For the quest-thwarting band of Armadans, ab-carnivalistic eccentricity has generated a disruption of everyday bureaucracy, affording them the power to freely experiment with otherwise precluded sociopolitical configurations. These mutinying pirates have exploited ab-carnivalism's unBakhtinian quiddities—its extralegality and potential for radicalism—to decide the fate of themselves and Armada.

A momentous consequence of the ab-carnivalistic mutiny in question is the sudden termination of the Lover-diarchy that has long defined their flotilla-city. The She-Lover, now a leper, ‘despised and feared as a liar’ (*S*, p. 785), refuses to merely forsake her quest for the Scar despite her He-analogue doing so. The unnamed woman remains committed to mining the world-wound’s possibilities. Boarding a vessel fitted with the arcane apparatus by which she might do so, the erstwhile diarch takes her leave of Armada on the morning after the ab-carnivalistic mutiny’s birth. She is last beheld sailing toward what she believes to be the Scar’s location. Ab-carnivalism has provoked the ex-ruler’s departure by rupturing her authority and precluding the fulfilment of her quest. It has catalysed a permanent dissolution of the biLoverism in Armada, therefore reconfiguring the ship-city’s political landscape.

In the wake of the She-Lover’s departure from Armada, ab-carnivalistic eccentricity is exercised to succour the Brucolac: the recently ousted vampir-governor of Dry Fall riding. A number of weeks earlier, the Brucolac charged his vampir cadre with aiding him in a barbaric mutiny against the Lovers: an attempt to assassinate the Garwater-diarchs and frustrate their quest for the Scar (an ongoing-yet-secret affair, at this juncture). Amid the maritime carnage, DouL bested the Brucolac in single combat, and the vampir’s cadre of warriors were soon thereafter routed by Lovers loyalists. By order of the co-rulers, the Brucolac was hitched to a *Grand Easterly*–mast so that, in retribution for the revolt, his unnatural flesh would each day be ravaged by sunlight. On the morning that the She-Lover initiates her solitary quest for the Scar, DouL takes advantage of the unfinished ab-carnivalistic mutiny to liberate the Brucolac:

DouL stood below the mast on which the Brucolac was crucified, the vampir’s early morning shrieks beginning weakly with the sun.

‘Cut him down’, said Uther DouL with authority to a nearby group of men and women. They looked up, startled, but did not question him. ‘Cut him down and take him home.’

And on that extraordinary morning, while the city felt its way towards new rules, and nobody knew what was permissible, or normal, or acceptable or right, DouL’s merciful order was obeyed. (*S*, p. 777)

Contained in this passage are two interrelated ab-carnivalistic eccentricities: the order to which DouL gives voice, and the mutineers’ unquestioned obeysance of it. Such gestures are ab-carnivalistic eccentricities because they transpire absent the Lovers’ authorisation, truncating and, in turn, subverting their ordained punishment of the Brucolac. The Lovers’

ab-carnivalistic deposition, and the city-wide anomie that attends it, have become a medium for official sadism's supersession by unofficial mercy. For Doul and those few Armadans who obey his command, ab-carnivalistic eccentricity facilitates the reification of an otherwise improbable willingness to reject the Lovers' vindictive politics.

While the Armadan commonalty's ab-carnivalistic mutiny entails a radical disruption of legitimate authority, it is, and will eventually be, followed by unradical change/s. 'It did not take long for the mutineers to relinquish control', writes Bellis, one month after that event's terminus, in a yet-to-be-addressed letter: 'They had no program, no party. [...] They snatched power in an anarchic and momentary coup, and gave it up easily' (*S*, p. 784). Their ab-carnivalism paves the way for a re-establishment of the piratical praxis that shaped Armada before the He- and She-Lover rendered it the instrument of their quest for the Scar. To invoke Bellis's letter-prose, 'This is a new chapter. The city is going back in time, readying itself to start again with its simple piracy in the rich shores near my home [New Crobuzon]' (*S*, p. 793). The mutineers' ab-carnivalism fruitfully exploits radicalism by toppling the He- and She-Lovers, yet such radicalism is naught but a means of restoring a bygone status quo. This constitutes neither a failing nor a missed opportunity: ab-carnivalism's radical potentialities are disregarded in favour of instituting a sought-after societal reversion. The Armadans instantiate ab-carnivalism's power to engender a popularly beneficial species of lasting change via transient radicalism that ultimately gives way to conservatism.

For the pirates-commoners who dwell in Armada, ab-carnivalism is a successfully radical-cum-conservative affair that hinges on an intersection with *parrhesia*. Here, as in *Un Lun Dun*, a *parrhesiastes* has been indispensable to the emergence of communal ab-carnivalism that shatters and reconfigures hierarchies.

7. Hexadic Revelations

The six ab-carnivalisms discussed in this chapter have collectively demonstrated the functional versatility of ab-carnivalism as a whole. The Flexible Puppet Theatre's performance of 'The Sad and Instructional Tale of Jack Half-a-Prayer' is a singular ab-carnivalism since it operates within the bounds of, and then extricates itself from, the purview of censorship-inflected Bakhtinian carnivalism. A virtue of this ab-carnivalism—one that

none of its five remaining fellows share—is its productive establishment of a performer–audience relationship: it generates wider participation via a seriocomic, Half-a-Prayer centric depiction of insurrection. Elsewhere, the strike action implemented by the vodyanoi stevedores in *Perdido Street Station* and the UMA-faithful in *Kraken*, respectively, are predicated on ab-carnivalism insufficient to the task of materialising the amelioration sought by their participants. However, these ab-carnivalisms prove to be valuable insofar as they facilitate the birth of coalitions between species- and hierarchy-distinct opponents of authority figures. Miéville-as-author’s avowal that there may one day emerge a successor to the prodigious UMA strike renders it more fecund ab-carnivalism than that of the vodyanoi stevedores. The radical Christmasarians’ march through London in ‘Tis the Season’ constitutes a more complex ab-carnivalism than those of the Flexibles and world-disconnected strikers. Indeed, it typifies ab-carnivalism’s potential to accommodate both solidarity and dissension among cohorts that hew to the same form of anti-official, amelioration-oriented goal. Although the ab-carnivalistic march does not engender its participants’ yearned-for reclamation of Christmas, it proves to be creative insofar as it furnishes the narrator-protagonist with a reconfigured worldview—an ostensibly radical politics. The Flexibles’ production and the strikes enacted by the Bas-Lagian vodyanoi and Londoners-familiars are sociopolitically constructive ab-carnivalisms insofar as they are modes of collective action that express a fidelity to quotidian amelioration. In other words, they carry weight by virtue of deviating from Bakhtinian carnival’s approbated and, thus, faux transgressions delimited by certain times and spaces.

The most extraordinary ab-carnivalisms among the specified six are those featured in *Un Lun Dun* and *The Scar*, respectively, because they, unlike the others, trigger lasting change. Tanner is a *parrhesiastes* of different ilk to that of Deeba: whereas he transmutes *parrhesia* into a mode of ab-carnivalistic eccentricity, she renders it the impetus for ab-carnivalism. The *parrhesia* associated with these ab-carnivalisms reflects an implicit assertion on Miéville’s part—namely that such discourse can directly affect the likelihood of ab-carnivalism inspiring lasting social change. *Un Lun Dun* and *The Scar*, in other words, illustrate that *parrhesia* can be a major determinant of ab-carnivalism’s capacity to provoke amelioration. Irrespective of their differences, the six Miéville fictions considered in this chapter are

fruitful methods of opposing authority figures since they give rise to spaces that accommodate new social, hierarchical and political possibilities.

Chapter Two: Renegopolitan Ab-Carnivalism in *Iron Council*

Revolutions are the festivals of the oppressed and the exploited.¹

—V.I. Lenin, *Two Tactics of Social Democracy in the Democratic Revolution* (1905)

‘[R]enegopolis’ (*IC*, p. 290) is a *sui generis* neologism in Miéville’s corpus of speculative fiction: it materialises once in the Bas-Lag trilogy’s third and final volume, *Iron Council*. Although Miéville withholds a definition of the term ‘renegopolis’, its meaning is decipherable by virtue of its referent: a ‘town’ (*IC*, p. 219) and ‘republic’ (*IC*, p. 430) of which the founder-inhabitants are a *mélange* of renegades known as the Iron Council. Given the Council’s sociopolitical composition, the denotation of Miéville’s coinage ‘renegopolis’ is effectively ‘a city-state founded and chiefly peopled by renegades’. The combining form ‘-polis’ holds considerable fecundity; as per the *Oxford English Dictionary*, it can be employed to render nouns that denote ‘types of city or town’.² An additional, equally tenable definition of the Miéville neologism ‘renegopolis’ can therefore be proffered: ‘a city founded and chiefly peopled by renegades’. Satisfying this definition of ‘renegopolis’ is the city produced by the New Crobuzon Collective: ‘a dissident town-within-a-town’ (*IC*, p. 359)—i.e., it is demarcated from the majority of New Crobuzon via Collectivist-occupied districts yet also remains part of it. For a time, this city ‘operate[s] like a power, an alternative city-state’ by virtue of the democratic, ‘overarching strategy’ (*IC*, p. 388) espoused by its insurrectionists-residents. At no juncture in its fleeting existence does it achieve any unqualified measure of renegopolitan statehood: it is solely a genus of renegade city. This chapter contends that the Iron Council and New Crobuzon Collective boast renegopoleis—my pluralisation of ‘renegopolis’—derived from, and influenced by, ab-carnivalism. It exemplifies ab-carnivalism’s power to dictate the means by which, as David L. Pike observes, cities in

¹ V.I. Lenin, *Two Tactics of Social Democracy in the Democratic Revolution* (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1952; repr. Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1970), pp. 124–125, emphasis in original.

² ‘-Polis, Comb. Form’, in *Oxford English Dictionary*

<https://www.oed.com/dictionary/polis_combform?tab=meaning_and_use#29480912> [accessed 22 September 2025].

Miéville's oeuvre constitute 'primary generative unit[s] of spatial representation, social formation, and meaning'.³

1. 'Welcome to the Free Territories': The New Crobuzon Collective

The terminus of the ab-carnivalism that brings forth and perpetuates the New Crobuzon Collective's renegopolis is not attended by the lasting change toward which its participants strive: a contrast to that of the Iron Council more than twenty years prior to its occurrence. The Collective thus serves as a judicious point of departure for this chapter's analysis.

The Collective's renegopolis proceeds from variegated crises in New Crobuzon: wagelessness; starvation; the commonfolk's uncertainty if Parliament is managing New Crobuzon's war with Tesh—City of the Crawling Liquid—in the manner it proclaims; ex-Militia publicising the war's true face; the materialisation of life-thieving apparitions (the spawn of a Teshi hecatombist) (*IC*, p. 358).

Above all, the Collective is traceable to New Crobuzoner commonfolk effecting an ab-carnivalistic demonstration against their wartime marginalisation by Parliament. Its enactors form an unapproved assembly, subverting the will of New Crobuzon's Parliament via their 'demand [that it grant them] protection' (*IC*, p. 358) against Tesh. To put it differently, this exasperated gathering of New Crobuzoners avail themselves of protest-fuelled ab-carnivalistic eccentricity in a bid to mitigate their quotidian crises. Scattered among the demonstrators are members of the Caucus—that is, a truce-born amalgam of New Crobuzon's unaligned and faction-affiliated insurrectionists. These Caucusists embrace divergent acts of rebellion: they cry out for more than protection against Tesh, dispensing inflammatory leaflets to their fellow protesters (*IC*, p. 358). The unlicensed nature of these anti-Parliament acts, and their intended contribution to political radicalism, render them ab-carnivalistic eccentricities that boast far greater subversiveness than the unCaucusist protesters' demand for Parliamentary succour. The demonstrators' ab-carnivalism is truncated by their clash with the New Crobuzon Militia. Having eventually routed the Militia, the protesters-combatants take to assembling the concatenation of barricades behind which the New

³ David L. Pike, 'China Miéville's Fantastic Slums and the Urban Abcanny', *Science Fiction Studies*, 46 (2019), 250–267 (p. 250).

Crobuzon Collective takes shape. Insofar as the commonfolk–Militia conflict would ultimately not have occurred in its absence, the ab-carnivalistic demonstration against Parliament cannot but constitute an indispensable fragment of the historical process by which the Collective materialises.

The attendant origination of the Collective’s ‘Free Territories’ (*IC*, p. 335)—the trio of districts that isolate their renegopolis from the remainder of New Crobuzon, from ‘Parliament’s city’ (*IC*, p. 380)—spawns ab-carnivalistic eccentricity predicated on ideological dialectics. When Ori Ciuraz (an insurrectionist-protagonist of *Iron Council*) stumbles upon the Collective’s threshold, a sentinel declaims, “[“]You’re either north” – and there were pantomime boos [from his fellows] – “back in the old days and old ways: or you’re in here, Kelltree and Echomire and Dog fucking Fenn [the Free Territories], in the future, which is now’ (*IC*, p. 355). The sentinel’s assertion of a Collectivist–Parliament/past–present dialectic, and his companions’ accompanying pantomime booing, signal a disavowal of submission to mundane authority figures, namely the Mayor, Parliament and the Militia. They are thus ab-carnivalistic eccentricities that foreground a crux of the ongoing civil war from which they emerge: the inability to reconcile conservative and revolutionary politics. These ab-carnivalistic gestures the genesis of a renegopolitan culture that positions side-taking as a necessity to determine one’s place in New Crobuzon.

The Collective’s renegopolitan society is moulded by ab-carnivalistic familiarity that counterposes the government-sanctioned fomentation of racial tensions. Beyond humans, the insurgents’ ranks encompass a menagerie of other sapient races: erinaceous hotchi and scarab-headed khepri; avian garuda, batrachian vodyanoi and vegetable-fleshed cactacae; gargoyle-like wyrmen who revel in scatological, slapstick impishness; and handlers—that is, hand-entities whose touch relegates humans and xenians to their flesh-puppets, endowing them with preternatural faculties (all of these demographics are specified in Chapter 25 of *Iron Council*). These racially disparate Bas-Lagians evoke ab-carnivalistic familiarity because i) the overarching impetus of their assembly and collaboration is toppling New Crobuzon’s government, and ii) there are, no doubt, those among them for whom contact with one another in ordinary life would seldom or never occur due to socio-hierarchical disparity. This ab-carnivalistic familiarity challenges state-fomented unrest between xenians—Bas-Lag’s sapient humanoids (e.g., hotchi, khepri, garuda, vodyanoi, cactacae)—and humans. Members

of the New Quill Party are humans who cleave to the notion that xenians are inferior to their own race,⁴ executing pogroms against those who are Crobuzoner. New Crobuzon's recently slain mayor, Eliza Stem-Fulcher,⁵ reputedly 'did backdoor deals with the New Quill Party, let their pogroms against xenians go uninvestigated' (*IC*, p. 326). One New Quillers-enacted pogrom of late, the Night of the Kinken Shards—the bigoted humans invaded the khepri ghetto Kinken, 'stamping the mindless males and butchering the women'—is ostensibly abided by the Militia at Stem-Fulcher's behest: 'After that attack, [...] the militia had come in to protect those few khepri not fled or murdered. But the Quillers did not have to flee: they were allowed to leave in an orderly and triumphant way' (*IC*, p. 368).⁶ The Collectivists' ab-carnivalistic familiarity has conjured a multiracial coalition that emblematises a popular contestation of the human-xenian animosity that Stem-Fulcher fomented via a collaboration with the New Quill Party. It has generated a renegopolitan culture founded on socio-racial equity.

For the most part, the Remade, too, benefit from the emergent ab-carnivalistic spirit of inclusivity bespoke by the Collectivists' disavowal of racial prejudice. 'In a speech to the strikers of the Turgisadi Foundry,' for instance, 'an agitator from the Caucus wave[s] at the [nearby] Remade workers to join the main mass and shout[s], "We're [i.e., the nascent band

⁴ The two-decades-old forerunner of the New Quill Party is the Three Quills. Miéville positions the Three Quillers as a background-element of the narrative in *Perdido Street Station*, yet he also incorporates several references to their xenophobic politics: "'Garuda aren't . . . adept at abstract thought'" (*PSS*, p. 147, emphasis in original), says a party faithful at a rally; the vodyanoi stevedores' ab-carnivalistic strike, as discussed in Chapter One, is repudiated by a cohort of their human peers, among whom '[o]ne or two carr[y] Three Quills literature', calling the strikers 'frogs and toads' (*PSS*, p. 361); some Quillers hew to ethnic cleansing in the New Crobuzon district Sheck ('Khepri filled Sheck's streets during the day [...] At night, though, it was a brave khepri who would walk streets made dangerous by pugnacious Three Quillers out to "keep their city clean"' (*PSS*, p. 255)). At an unspecified juncture during the two decades that pass between *Perdido Street Station* and *Iron Council*, Sheck mutates into 'a stronghold of New Quill' (*IC*, p. 318).

⁵ Stem-Fulcher is shot dead by the leader of an anarchist faction styled the Toroans (an appellation derived from said leader's sporting of a thaumaturgic, bull-shaped helmet). This assassination—the product of months-long scheming on the Toroans' part—occurs shortly before, yet ultimately has no bearing on, the New Crobuzon Collective's inception.

⁶ The Night of the Kinken Shards doubtless constitutes Miéville's Bas-Lagian riff on the pogrom enacted in Germany on November 9–10, 1938. On these days, Germans aligned with the Nazi Party reified their Judeophobia: they murdered scores of Jews, subjecting a great deal more to physical abuse; they vandalised thousands of Jewish-owned businesses and Jewish residences; they laid waste to numerous synagogues (Alan E. Steinweis, *Kristallnacht 1938* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2009), p. 2). This event is most often designated '*Kristallnacht*', for the English ideogrammatic translation is 'night of the broken glass'—a reference to the multitude of window-glass shards strewn across the sidewalks outside the vandalised Jewish stores (Steinweis, *Kristallnacht 1938*, p. 2). In a redolent fashion, the Night of the Kinken Shards is named as such due to the 'glass needles' (*IC*, p. 368) that cover Kinken's ground in the wake of its residents' slaughter.

of Collectivists are] Remaking the damn city: who knows better about that than you?'" (*IC*, p. 384). The Caucusist's amicable wave publicly advocates an insurrectionist dissolution of conventional whole–Remade segregation, thus deploying coterminous forms of ab-carnivalistic familiarity and eccentricity. The rhetorical question that s/he asks them strips the word 'Remaking' of its accepted, pejorative meaning, namely an unsought, state-sanctioned, disciplinary flesh-alteration. S/he exercises an ab-carnivalistic eccentricity by which the word 'Remaking' obtains a commonalty-oriented sanguinity because it encapsulates the Collective's revolutionary telos—a volitional, unlicensed and anti-government remaking of New Crobuzon. The ab-carnivalisation of this nomenclature evinces its speakers' repudiation of a sociocultural norm in New Crobuzon: tensions between free-and-whole (unRemade individuals) and enslaved Remade.

For all its merits, the Collectivists' renegopolitan ab-carnivalism does not yield a utopian culture: many of its participants cannot, or refuse to, abandon certain quotidian prejudices. By doing so, they preclude ab-carnivalism from fostering unqualified amity in the New Crobuzon Collective, signalling an unproductive continuity between past and present.

Such ab-carnivalism is evinced by the assemblage of handlers who succour the Collectivists because, according to an ill-defined rationale—"whether odd altruism or a politic calculation, the Collective's negotiators never knew" (*IC*, pp. 368–369)—they withstand their Parliament-loyal brothersisters. Negotiations between the Collectivists and race-renegade handlers (*IC*, p. 369) are unlicensed, atypical (they make for 'unlikely allies' (*IC*, p. 368)) and predicated on an intercommunal hostility toward New Crobuzon's regime. As such, they are coterminous genera of ab-carnivalistic familiarity and eccentricity. These Bakhtinian-Miévillean acts give rise to a tainted solidarity, for the Collectivists disdain the handlers: 'It may have sickened the negotiators to do deals with these symbols of corruption and parasite cunning, but they would turn nothing down now' (*IC*, p. 369). The subsequent pages in *Iron Council* offer no indication whether there develops any measure of fellowship between these newly collaborating Bas-Lagians; it remains a productive ab-carnivalistic possibility. Ab-carnivalism has sparked a puissant revolutionary coalition, yet it neither effaces nor mitigates the Collectivists' racial discrimination against their sudden handlers-allies. In addition to amalgamating these New Crobuzoner demographics for the sake of radical politics, it unproductively enables their tension-fraught relations to continue.

As with the handlers, a number of Remade Collectivists experience ab-carnivalistic familiarity that is debased by everyday prejudices: ‘in the first moments of the New Crobuzon Collective, there had been those [free-and-whole] who refused to work with the Remade. Necessity had changed most of their minds’ (*IC*, p. 384). The free-and-whole Collectivists who stand firm in their refusal to collaborate with the Remade call forth non-inclusive and, hence, defective ab-carnivalistic familiarity. They reaffirm and buttress the established whole/Remade decorum from which socio-hierarchical inequality arises, and by which it is perpetuated, in New Crobuzon. The pockets of lingering free-and-whole disdain for Remade thwart an egalitarian configuration of renegopolitan-cum-revolutionary populace. In doing so, they emphasise ab-carnivalistic familiarity’s limitations *vis-à-vis* the Collectivists’ nurturement of renegopolitan solidarity. Ab-carnivalism’s inability to annihilate socio-hierarchical tensions between the thaumaturgically deformed convict-Collectivists and their whole comrades ultimately tarnishes their renegopolitan culture.

The Collective’s dollyboy sex workers—gay men, aesthetes who sport dresses and exaggerated *maquillage*⁷—likewise evince a tension-ridden strain of renegopolitan ab-carnivalistic familiarity. The preponderance of New Crobuzoners are heterosexual; those known to hold same-sex desires or practise same-sex fucking are lepers branded ‘inverts’.⁸ Same-sex fucking is lawfully punishable in New Crobuzon—Militia visit the city’s scandalous inns⁹ to engage in honey trapping, issuing ‘a stint for Gross Depravity to any [man] who approche[s] them’ (*IC*, p. 107)—and is disapproved of even among

⁷ In an interview with Jayna Brown, Miéville avows that ‘*Iron Council* [...] drew a fair bit on stuff about gay culture in London in the 18th century, the working class [*sic*] tradition of the molly houses and so on’ (Jayna Brown, ‘Socialist Irrealism: An interview with China Miéville’, *Social Text*, 4 January 2012 <https://socialtextjournal.org/periscope_article/socialist_irrealism_an_interview_with_china_mieville/> [accessed 21 September 2025]). The molly houses of eighteenth-century London encompassed the amalgamation of quasi-private parties and pubs tailored to individuals who held sodomitical interests (Peter Bartlett, ‘Sodomites in the Pillory in Eighteenth-Century London’, *Social and Legal Studies*, 6 (1997) 553–572 (p. 554)). These locales afforded mollies—men who practised anal sex—the opportunity to socialise with one another, to consciously mimic women and to evince camp mannerisms: prior to the end of the eighteenth-century’s first decade, mollies had produced a subcultural self-identity (Rictor Norton, ‘Introduction’, in *Eighteenth-Century British Erotica II*, ed. by Rictor Norton, 5 vols (Oxon: Routledge, 2016), pp. vii–xxiii (p. viii)). As suggested by their phonetic similarity, the dollyboys of New Crobuzon are effectively Bas-Lagian cousins to the mollies that dwell in extratextual history.

⁸ Miéville derives the term ‘invert’ from the extratextual world—that is, from nineteenth-century formulations of ‘sexual inversion’, which have long been outdated. ‘Sexual inversion’, writes Havelock Ellis, ‘means sexual instinct turned by inborn constitutional abnormality toward persons of the same sex’ (Havelock Ellis, *Studies in the Psychology of Sex*, 6 vols, 3rd edn, rev. and enlarged (Philadelphia, PA: F.A. Davis, 1915), p. 1).

⁹ These inns amount to Bas-Lagian iterations of molly houses.

revolutionaries (e.g., one Caucusist man finds that his comrades do not judge him for practising same-sex fucking only, they have twice informed him, ‘because good insurrectionists do not blame victims for being distorted by a sick society’ (*IC*, p. 108). Given the popular disdain that dollyboys suffer due to their appearances and unashamed inverthood, their bellicosity-rooted collaboration with the heterosexual Collectivists to dislodge Mayor Triesti’s regime signals ab-carnivalistic familiarity. The dollyboys’ newfound insurgent-peers expose them to prejudice that attenuates. ‘At first they had been greeted with disgust [by the heterosexual Collectivists]; then with forbearance, as they fought [against the Militia] without restraint; then with exasperated affection. No one [in the Collective] wanted them to be overrun’ (*IC*, p. 372). The dollyboys’ ab-carnivalistic familiarity is thus the basis for warfare by which the heterosexual Collectivists’ initial, everyday scorn for them gives way to acceptance. This acceptance, of course, is neither absolute nor straightforward: it is rooted in their comrades’ ‘exasperated affection’, as opposed to affection *tout court*. Ab-carnivalistic familiarity has played an indispensable part in calling forth a dramatic mitigation of a popular, entrenched anti-queerness among New Crobuzon’s radicals. It has transformed the dollyboys’ unashamed inverthood into a medium for enriching renegopolitan solidarity between sexually counterposed communities.

The ultraequalitarians who advocate for their Collectivist comrades’ deployment of exclusively multiracial squads capture ab-carnivalistic familiarity marked by an idealism–pragmatism dialectic:

So many debates over the pure-race squads! When the gangs of khepri guard sisters had come and said they would fight for the Collective, when the cactus squads had offered themselves as heavy infantry, some of the [ultraequalitarian] officers argued hard against it. ‘We’re Collectivists!’ they had said. ‘Not cactus or human or Remade or vodyanoi or whatever! We stand and fight together.’ And it was an impressive, even moving position, but it did not always make sense. ‘Would the chaver,’ a vodyanoi delegate had, to laughter, asked one of the most strident human ultraequalitarian anarchists, ‘like to join me tonight as we trawl the riverbed for militia bombs?’

And if the vodyanoi had to be given the freedom to operate together (though each corps, the equalitarianists insisted, contained one symbolic and powerless officer from another race, as a comradely reminder), was it not absurd to deny that to others? Wouldn’t a crew of khepri trained in stingboxes be less likely to inadvertently hurt their own?

In the case of cactacae it became expedient: squads of the very strong were needed. Only the most augmented Remade could join them, with their agreement. (*IC*, p. 367)

The ultraequalitarians' endorsement of multiracial squads, and the vodyanoi delegate's humorous rejoinder-question, instantiate a form of counter-government friendship untrammelled by socio-hierarchical determinants. To put it differently, they are specimens of ab-carnivalistic familiarity that belong to the domain of civil war-inflected renegopolitan life. The vodyanoi delegate's pragmatic question-response to the ultraequalitarians who idealistically denounce pure-race squads exemplify ab-carnivalistic familiarity's shortcomings with regard to renegopolitan solidarity. If, as the ultraequalitarians desire, the Collective solely employed multiracial squads, they would be party to a well-intentioned, albeit injudicious, ab-carnivalistic familiarity, given their disparate somatic talents, limitations and weapon-specific training. Squad-based inclusivity would perhaps spawn a detrimental mode of Collectivist ab-carnivalistic familiarity owing to its attendant ethical and practical issues: the second paragraph of the antecedent extract from *Iron Council* signals this. The most sensible method by which the Collectivists can promote revolutionary-renegopolitan solidarity is subordinating idealism to ab-carnivalistic pragmatism.

There materialises ab-carnivalistic profanation that finds expression in the band of Collectivists or sympathiser punks—Miéville withholds specification as to which—who vandalise the slow-sculptures in the New Crobuzon district Ludmead. Dedicated to the Bas-Lagian godlet of patience, these garden sculptures are formless, pullulating with carefully drilled shafts that hold a slow-acting caustic agent. Over a number of years, this agent ensures that the sculptures' carapaces exuviate via weathering until they metamorphose into the shapes that their artists intended. The Collectivists or sympathiser punks employ chisels to defile the unbarred sculptures:

With cheerful imprecision and disrespect they had made crude and quick and vulgar figures, lively and ugly, ground filthy and dissident slogans into their skins. They had ruined the meticulous boring and acid-work of the artists, preempting the erosion-sculptures with pornographic clowns. [...] [A] new stone figure [was] stroking an oversized cock, carved out of what might have been intended as a swan or a boat or a flower or anything at all. (*IC*, p. 468)

By unofficially relegating the hallowed sculptures to lewd objects that capture a simultaneously godling- and Parliament-oriented disdain, this vandalism marks a renegopolitan style of ab-carnivalistic profanation. The dissidents who desecrate the godling-of-patience slow-sculptures do so before Dog Fenn—'the Collective's heart', its district-

‘stronghold’ (*IC*, p. 372)—falls to the Militia. Their ab-carnivalistic profanation subordinates holy patience to revolutionary impatience, thus disseminating their conviction that doing so is a prerequisite for radical social change. They position an art-predicated form of ab-carnivalistic profanation as a medium of revolutionary catharsis and jury-rigged propaganda.

When the Collective’s demise becomes a foregone conclusion, a contingent of its insurrectionists-residents proclaim their unfaltering allegiance to revolutionary ab-carnivalism via a prodigious spectacle. ‘[H]undreds of Collectivists [were on the streets of their renegopolis], a last wave of mobilisations, of every race. Little snips of magic, prestidigitation of light, chromathaumaturgy sending up pretences of birds made of radiance. The rebels made the night a carnival, as it had once been’ (*IC*, pp. 397–398). Owing to its non-approbated and dissident ethos, this Collectivist spectacle is quasi-renegopolitan, transmuting the night not into ‘a carnival’, but rather an ab-carnival. The mirthful event’s omniracial dimension—its encompassment of humans, vodyanoi, khepri, hotchi, cactacae, and so forth—evokes ab-carnivalistic familiarity, while the summoning of chromathaumaturgic bird-pretences is an ab-carnivalistic eccentricity. Both ab-carnivalistic phenomena are productive insofar as they afford the Collectivists an ameliorative indulgence in their self-made and increasingly precarious renegopolitan culture.

In an interview with Shapiro, Miéville voices the fact that ‘*Iron Council* is a kind of crossbreed of the 1871 Paris Commune with the American West’.¹⁰ The novel, to be more precise, fundamentally qualifies as such on account of the New Crobuzon Collective, for it bespeaks a modified configuration of the Paris Commune. Inaugurated on 18 March, 1971, by members of the Parisian working class, the Paris Commune was a revolutionary government that endured seventy-two days. Colette E. Wilson observes that before Adolphe Thiers—the leader of the National Assembly—ordained government troops to re-enter Paris and reclaim it from the Communards, ‘an atmosphere of relief, jollity and carnival prevailed’.¹¹ Henri Lefebvre’s interpretation of the Paris Commune likewise draws attention to its carnivalistic spirit: ‘The Paris Commune [...] was for one thing an immense, epic festival [*fete*], a [...] spring festival in the Cité, a festival of the disinherited and the

¹⁰ Shapiro, ‘Gothic Politics’, p. 69.

¹¹ Colette E. Wilson, *Paris and the Commune, 1871–78: The Politics of Forgetting* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), p. 6.

proletarians, a revolutionary festival and festival of the Revolution, a total festival'.¹² The Collectivists' ab-carnivalism establishes an association between Bas-Lag and the extratextual world—between themselves and the Communards on whom Miéville's representation of them and their renegopolis is predicated.

The ab-carnivalistic quiddities of the Paris Commune find expression in various fashions. 'When the armed people [of Paris] came out into the streets,' writes Pëtr Kropotkin, recounting the events that transpired on 18 March, 1871, 'the rulers fled away, the troops evacuated the town, the civil functionaries hurriedly retreated to Versailles [...] The government evaporated like a pond of stagnant water in a spring breeze'.¹³ The Parisian commonalty's occupation of their city's streets while bearing self-given weapons was unauthorised, serving as an impromptu-yet-weighty exhibition of anti-government bellicosity: it marked an ab-carnivalistic eccentricity. By virtue of galvanising the rulers, troops and civil functionaries into fleeing Paris, the masses effectively fractured the established socio-hierarchical configuration therein. Stated otherwise, they called forth a revolutionary ab-carnivalistic decrowning (indeed, as Kropotkin puts it, the Parisian commonalty effected an 'overthrow of the central power').¹⁴ Arising from this officialdom-routing was a coterminous ab-carnivalistic crowning, for the triumphant commonfolk assumed a *de facto*-yet-incontrovertible reign over Paris. A noteworthy product of their Bakhtinian-Miévillean festivity was a coterminous renegopolis: 'For two months,' writes Philip M. Katz, 'this motley crew led a popular revolution that transformed Paris into a self-governing city-state'.¹⁵ Communards garbed themselves in and flourished red emblems, singing the Marseillaise from the pulpit of a church that hosted revolutionaries, as opposed to a congregation;¹⁶ the rebels overturned quotidian social and power relations by expelling nuns from educational and charity establishments, by intimidating landlords, by arresting erstwhile police officials; and, in a partial manner, the words and actions of the Commune's armed women's units—e.g., the Légion des Fédérées—implicitly and explicitly overturned

¹² Henri Lefebvre, 'The Style of the Commune', in Henri Lefebvre: Key Writings, ed. by Stuart Elden and others (London: Continuum, 2003) pp. 188–189 (p. 188).

¹³ Peter Kropotkin [sic], *The Commune of Paris* (London: W. Reeves, 1895), p. 3.

¹⁴ Kropotkin [sic], *The Commune of Paris*, p. 3.

¹⁵ Philip M. Katz, "'Lessons from Paris": The American Clergy Responds to the Paris Commune', *Church History*, 63 (1994), 393–406 (p. 394).

¹⁶ Martin Phillip Johnson, *The Paradise of Association: Political Culture and Popular Organizations in the Paris Commune of 1871* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1996), p. 11.

usual gender relations.¹⁷ Given that these unlicensed, socio-hierarchically disruptive deeds were founded on the Communards' mobilisation against the government, they were ab-carnivalistic eccentricities. At bottom, ab-carnivalism affords us a lens through which to apprehend the carnivalistic nuances—the Bakhtinian-Miévillean quiddities—that fuelled the Parisians' victorious uprising and subsequent formation of revolutionary togetherness.

The Collective's ab-carnivalism, like that which is staged by the Londoners-familiars in *Kraken*, forges a quasi-continuity between Miéville's fiction and extratextual history. It bespeaks his employment of the fantastic aesthetic to reimagine cultural elements of the Paris Commune and, by doing so, satisfy an extratextual function: reinvigorating its legacy.

As with the Paris Commune, the New Crobuzon Collective's rebellion comes to naught: its insurgents-denizens are devoid of the forces necessary to vanquish the entrenched regime. The Collectivists' revolutionary ab-carnivalism and renegopolis are fractured by the Militia's tenacious onslaught on their ranks at the behest of Parliament and Mayor Triesti.

'Failed revolutions', Miéville remarks of extratextual history, 'bring forth a blossoming of ruling-class viciousness, carnivals of reaction, the sadisms of relief and retrenched rule'.¹⁸ In the wake of the Collective's fruitless ab-carnivalism and attendant collapse, New Crobuzon becomes the locus of a reactionary Militia carnival at Mayor Triesti's behest. By way of illustration, there now exist 'new rules', and the Militia patrol the streets of the battle-scarred city,¹⁹ locking down bearing ties to the fallen Collective (they are eager to visit retribution on alleged remnants of Collectivist treason) (*IC*, p. 465); 'a quickly clenched fist risked being interpreted as handslang and the militia might be called or there might be a quick vigilante killing to save the area from renegade insurgents and the death squads they would bring'; the *Runagate Rampant*-affiliate and ex-insurrectionist Madeleina di Farja rehearses the means by which the Militia have persecuted the masses of late:

'It's better now', she said. 'But in the first weeks, gods.

¹⁷ Johnson, *The Paradise of Association*, p. 12.

¹⁸ China Miéville, 'On Social Sadism', *Salvage*, 17 December 2015 <<https://salvage.zone/in-print/on-social-sadism/>> [accessed 2 September 2025].

¹⁹ 'New Crobuzon was wrecked', writes Miéville. 'Its statues broken, districts stained and blistered by fire, whole streets become facades, the buildings eviscerated. Houses, churches, factories, foundries as hollow and brittle as old skulls. Wrecks floated in the rivers' (*IC*, p. 467).

‘Bodies by walls, every one of them “resisting”, they [the Militia] said, while they were taken away. Resisting by tripping, or asking a moment’s rest, or spitting, resisting by not coming fast enough when they were told.

‘Up by the Arrowhead Pits, in the foothills,’ she said. ‘Camp Sutory. It’s where they keep the Collectivists. Thousands. No one knows how many. There’s an annex: go in, you don’t come out, so they say. When they’re done asking questions. (IC, p. 467)

The New Crobuzon Collective’s failed genus of revolutionary-cum-renegopolitan ab-carnivalism has exacerbated the commonalty’s quotidian subjection to government oppression by inspiring Triesti’s sanctioning of a reactionary carnival. Rather than generating new sociopolitical possibilities, the insurrectionists’ radical ab-carnivalism has instigated a diminishment of those that pre-existed its occurrence. Its telos of empowering New Crobuzon’s commonfolk has proven to be counterproductive.

‘As a practice, failure’, Judith Halberstam contends, ‘recognizes that alternatives are embedded already in the dominant and that power is never total or consistent.’²⁰ Halberstam elucidates the manner in which the tragic failure of the Collectivists’ revolutionary and renegopolitan ab-carnivalism carries weight. That is, it unveils the feasibility of eschewing the tension-riddled cultural configurations that ordinarily obstruct a commonalty-effected mobilisation against authoritarian officialdom.

Ab-carnivalism has served as a prerequisite for the New Crobuzon Collective and its districts-comprised renegopolis, and while it cleaves to a rejection of its Bakhtinian harbinger’s licensed transgressiveness, it has fallen prey to the same schema as that harbinger: a disturbance of the status quo, only to soon thereafter re-establish it.

2. Humble Beginnings: A Prelude to the Iron Council

Over two decades before the Collective’s rise, Weather Wrightby—a tycoon who hails from New Crobuzon—orchestrates the construction of Bas-Lag’s first transcontinental railroad. The workforce responsible for this immense undertaking belongs to Wrightby’s Transcontinental Railroad Trust (TRT), preponderantly comprising disparate New Crobuzoners: enslaved Remade and free-and-whole men (employees). On account of the

²⁰ Judith Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), p. 88.

popularly disdained underclass to which their distorted, criminality-bespeaking flesh has relegated them, the Remade suffer licensed maltreatment. The convicts-grotesques are chained to one another (*IC*, p. 180), herded like cattle (*IC*, p. 144), imprisoned in stockades (*IC*, p. 184); TRT overseers freely chastise them by way of whipping (*IC*, pp. 141, 182, 200), while guard-thaumaturges do so via hexes (*IC*, p. 185); unrelenting disobedience is punishable by death (*IC*, pp. 185–186). ‘Crews work in cadres, all convict Remade or all freemen, no mixing’ (*IC*, p. 182), for the latter cohort are ‘the aristocracy of this labour’ (*IC*, p. 141). Inhabited by she-prostitutes, the vagrant tent-city Fucktown depends on this industry: it follows the leviathanic ‘perpetual train’ that traverses Wrightby’s burgeoning railroad. Amid a prolonged period of overdue wages, some free-and-whole TRT men normalise exploitation of the Fucktowners’ services on credit via assurances of payment in arrears. To exercise the words of Ann-Hari—an organiser-counsellor among the mistreated Fucktowners—‘They [the gendarmes and freemen-workers] come and say put it on my tab girl and you can’t say no and you know they ain’t going to pay’ (*IC*, p. 197). A number of men take to beating the sex workers, fracturing their bones and maiming them (*IC*, p. 197). Scores of Fucktowners execute an ab-carnivalistic strike followed by three others: one by free-and-whole tunnellers in response to that of the women; one by freemen graders for undisclosed reasons; and one by Remade who have resolved to evade strikebreaking.

As will become manifest, each of these ab-carnivalism-fuelled strikes not only subverts TRT authority but also paves the way for the genesis of the Iron Council’s wheeled renegopolis.

Ab-carnivalism informs the Fucktowners’ strike in various fashions. The sex workers ‘turn away the hammermen, tunnel-men, gendarmes’; they form a ‘picket’ that doubles as a ‘militia’, guard Fucktown by way of ‘patrols with sticks and stilettos’; they ‘swish their skirts and laugh while the [spurned] men watch’; and they formulate a chant-slogan that propagates their devotion to workplace justice: ‘No pay no lay’ (*IC*, p. 197). Such deeds are ab-carnivalistic eccentricities: they repudiate-cum-subvert the illegitimate authority by which the TRT freemen have beaten the women and exploited their services. The women’s militia-picket endows them with an ab-carnivalistic crowning, insofar as it suspends their recently normalised abuse by enabling them to dictate when the free-and-whole TRT men can access their services. The men undergo a concomitant ab-carnivalistic decrowning, in that their

hitherto-untrammelled faculty to exploit the women's services has been effaced. Given that the whole men's exploitation of the Fucktowners' services is traceable to the breach of faith bespoke by the TRT's delay in delivering their wages, the present ab-carnivalistic strike challenges the integrity of both the men and the TRT itself. It is an assault on injustice suffered by the sex workers and the freemen irrespective of whether either group acknowledges it as such. Ab-carnivalism is a means by which the subjugated women reclaim their sexual agency, fracturing patriarchal, sex-based socio-hierarchical praxes on behalf of workplace justice.

Nonetheless, the exasperated Fucktowners have begotten an imperfect brand of ab-carnivalistic sisterhood: 'There must be those among them who are not happy with the [emergent] confrontation, but they are quietened into solidarity' (*IC*, p. 197). This suppression of dissenting voices—this press-ganging—forecloses a genuinely unqualified vein of ab-carnivalistic solidarity among the she-strikers by virtue of subordinating the desires of the few to those of the many. Stated otherwise, it marginalises certain women for the greater good of Fucktown, thus rendering ab-carnivalism a coterminous medium for, and impediment to, sisterhood.

The Fucktowners' ensuing thrashing of the disgruntled, lascivious men who attempt to penetrate their militia-picket—they do so 'with something between lightheartedness and anger' (*IC*, p. 198)—conjure an ab-carnivalistic decrowning–crowning. The men undergo an ab-carnivalistic decrowning since their beating marks the coda of the illegitimate, patriarchal authority by which they have freely abused the women. The Fucktowners' triumph ('the men retreat holding split heads and screaming in astonishment as much as pain' (*IC*, p. 198)) concretises a disavowal of their quotidian acquiescence to victimhood: it constitutes an ab-carnivalistic crowning. Ab-carnivalistic thrashing has enabled the aggrieved sex workers to slough off their normalised victimhood by disturbing the socio-hierarchical system from which it arises. It serves as an ameliorative vein of disciplinary action on the women's part.

The TRT's free-and-whole tunnellers and graders hereafter participate in reactionist modalities of ab-carnivalism by way of implementing strike action of their own. The tunnelmen gather outside the tunnel on which they have been labouring, refusing to complete it until the Fucktowners again extend credit to them ('—[w]e go back in', the spokesman tells

the overseers, ‘when them girls let us back in, too’ (*IC*, p. 198)); they embrace a bellicose demeanour, (‘[t]he tunnellers are arranged like a fighting unit, and they carry their picks’ (*IC*, pp. 199–200); the graders, in turn, refuse to work (*IC*, p. 200). Each of these deeds qualifies as an ab-carnivalistic eccentricity, for they contribute to the emergence of an ‘idle workforce’ (*IC*, p. 199) that destabilises the TRT’s labour hierarchy. A product of their enactment is that the tunnel-men and graders divest the overseers of obedient subordinates, thereby initiating ab-carnivalistic decrowning. Both contingents of workers, furthermore, now wield the illegitimate-yet-functional prerogative to determine if and when labour on Wrightby’s yearned-for railroad will commence: they confer on themselves an ab-carnivalistic crowning. The tunnel-men’s ab-carnivalism exacerbates tensions between themselves and the Fucktowners due to its telos of re-establishing their patriarchal oppression of the former community, while that of the tunnel-men cleaves to an unspecified objective. Nevertheless, the ab-carnivalistic strikes effected by both circles of men fundamentally synergise with that of women to resist the lawful authority of Wrightby and his TRT. The incongruence between these ab-carnivalites’ objectives has not foreclosed their contributions to an immense unsettlement of established labour praxes.

The anonymous individual/s who handwrite/s editions of *Runagate Rampant*—New Crobuzon’s best-known seditious newsheet—that address the strikes engage in ab-carnivalistic eccentricity oriented toward amity-making. This assertion is substantiated by the words contained in the handwritten newsletters:

This is not three strikes, or two strikes and a half. This is one strike, against one enemy [the TRT], with one goal. The women are not our opponents. The women are not to be blamed. No pay no lay they tell us, and that can be our slogan too. We will not lay another tie, another rail, until the money promised is ours. They say it, and we say it too. We say: *No pay no lay!* (*IC*, p. 199, emphasis in original)

The newsheet’s writer/s employ/s ab-carnivalistic eccentricity by i) propagating the neglected fact that the Fucktowners’ and railroad workers’ mutual opponent is the TRT, and by ii) positing a parallel between the former group’s slogan—‘[n]o pay no lay’—and their own refusal to lay additional ties or rails until they receive their overdue wages. The handwriting of this agitational newsheet is an ab-carnivalistic eccentricity that dovetails with, and augments the potency of, those enacted by the striking prostitutes’ and TRT men.

The ab-carnivalistic written word is here a puissant medium for transgression by virtue of foregrounding the anti-TRT commonalties between the he- and she-strikers.

The *galère* of Remade who shortly thereafter initiate their own strike do so by resisting an overseer's endeavours to render them strikebreakers, thus embracing ab-carnivalism:

—Pick up the picks, the foreman says to the Remade. —Go into the tunnel. Cut the rock. We'll instruct you.

And there is a silence and no motion. The gendarmes have interposed between the strikers and the Remade.

—Take the picks. Go into the tunnel. Follow it to the end. Cut it.

There is silence again a while. The [free-and-whole] men of the perpetual train know how the Remade are being used, and some begin to shout *scab, scab* preemptively. But the shouts die because none of the Remade are moving.

—Take the picks.

When there is no movement still, the overseer strikes with his whip. It lands loudly and with the blossoming of a scream. A Remade drops, hands to his opened face. There are fear noises, and some of the Remade start and begin to move but one of them makes a low command and they shudder and hold, except one who breaks and runs for the tunnel. (*IC*, p. 200, emphasis in original)

Among the Remade under discussion, all but one—he who enters the tunnel—avail themselves of ab-carnivalistic eccentricity by disobeying the overseer's commands. In days past, the strike action effected by free-and-whole TRT labourers in response to overdue wages was truncated because overseers compelled thrall-Remade to engage in 'punitive work' (*IC*, p. 185)—that is, to become strikebreakers. By virtue of fracturing this paradigm, the contemporary Remades' ab-carnivalistic eccentricity equates to a profound gesture of solidarity with the striking tunnellers. Since the overseer's desperate attempts to dragoon that contingent of Remade into submissiveness come to naught, he is afflicted by an ab-carnivalistic decrowning. The criminals-grotesques' recalcitrance gives rise to an ab-carnivalistic crowning: its upholding of the tunnellers' strike and its concomitant extension of the TRT's dysfunctionality positions them as illegitimate authority figures. The Remade who stand their ground against the whip-brandishing overseer render ab-carnivalism a method for circumventing their normalised strikebreaking. It affords this assemblage of miscellaneously deformed convicts the opportunity to promulgate of their erstwhile acquiescence to official coercion. The Remades' motionlessness in the face of sanctioned oppression becomes an ab-carnivalistic strategy for conjuring unprecedented intercommunal transgression.

The criminal-workers' ab-carnivalistic strike prompts the chagrined and now-desperate overseer to single out a boy among their ranks, to mislabel him as their ringleader. The overseer instructs a pair of gendarmes to beat the thaumaturgy-modified boy: an endeavour to galvanise the unyielding Remade into recommenced subservience. The disparate strike-contingents—the Fucktowners, the free-and-whole tunnellers and graders, the enslaved Remade—are distraught and unable to avert their eyes. After a brief hesitation, the strikers intervene: they revolt against the gendarmes.

Neoteric ab-carnivalistic phenomena materialise amid this clash. Uzman—a Remade marked by pipe-riddled flesh—bellows a series of unspecified, gendarmerie-hostile orders to his fellow strikers-insurrectionists; ‘there are those [among them] who obey him: Remade and free whole men and women [...] take their orders from this nondescript Remade man’ (*IC*, p. 202). The whole men and women execute Uzman’s unofficial, insurgent orders despite his Remadehood-dictated socio-hierarchical inferiority to them, which would ordinarily constitute sufficient grounds for them declining to do so. Uzman and his obedient whole-allies thus avail themselves of ab-carnivalistic eccentricity. In the wake of this ab-carnivalistic militancy, hundreds of Remade are delivered from the stockades to which they were confined (‘No one is sure who did it, [or] how’ (*IC*, p. 204)). By virtue of the perpetrator doing so illicitly, in an endeavour to sharpen the unfolding destabilisation of TRT authority, they exercise ab-carnivalistic eccentricity. The emancipated Remade become part of, and hereafter freely interact with, the whole railroad labourers and Fucktowners from whom they are customarily segregated. Insofar as these thaumaturgically misshapen convicts do so absent licence and, hence, subvert the TRT gendarmerie’s jurisdiction over them, they give rise to ab-carnivalistic familiarity. The facticity of this sudden, untrammelled interaction between the free-and-whole and Remade betokens an ab-carnivalistic *mésalliance*: it unifies high and low demographics. Ab-carnivalism is formative to the impromptu mutiny by which the Fucktowners, slave Remade and whole railroaders succour the brutalised Remade boy. It has conjured and perpetuated solidarity among that coalition of dissident Bas-Lagian circles, facilitating an otherwise impossible routing of the TRT gendarmes

In the aftermath of this battle, there occurs a mutineer meeting in which a series of ab-carnivalistic gestures catalysed by Ann-Hari ameliorate whole–Remade relations. ‘Someone [among the whole men’s ranks] jeers and makes a noise about the godsdamned Remade’ (*IC*,

p. 206), inspiring Ann-Hari to demonstrate her solidarity with the thaumaturgically warped convicts by kissing Uzman twice, on the mouth. By virtue of the fact that Remade and Fucktowners are quotidianly segregated under gendarmerie law, these kisses betoken an embrace of ab-carnivalistic familiarity. The first and, by extension, the second kiss is ‘a vivid transgression’ (*IC*, p. 206) against the TRT-mandated and gendarme-enforced prohibition of Fucktowners–Remade sexual activity. Stated otherwise, the kisses are ab-carnivalistic eccentricities that terminate the TRT gendarmerie’s hitherto-successful efforts to thwart sexual relations between the she-prostitutes and the assembly of grotesque slaves. The Fucktowners from whom there proceeds ‘cheer[s]’ (*IC*, p. 206) in response to the couple’s second kiss denotes their support for the anti-official politics that it embodies. These women thus avail themselves of interrelated ab-carnivalistic eccentricity. ‘—[I]f anyone deserves service on *credit*, it’s the damn Remade’, declaims Ann-Hari, addressing the strikers; a number of her fellow prostitutes thus ‘seek out Remade ostentatiously to touch’ (*IC*, p. 206, emphasis in original)—an attempt to reify their tantamount gendarmerie-resistant devotion to fellowship with the convicts. Given its flagrant, deliberate objective of undercutting the TRT gendarmes’ already diminished authority, such physicality amounts to an ab-carnivalistic eccentricity. The kisses that Ann-Hari and Uzman share are ab-carnivalistic deeds that attenuate the Remades’ somatic and socio-ideological discrimination on the part of the Fucktowners. While the ameliorative efficacy of this ab-carnivalism is neither immediate nor all-encompassing—i.e., some Fucktowners are ‘aghast’ (*IC*, p. 206) at these kisses—the additional, supportive brand of ab-carnivalistic behaviour to which it gives rise nurture a radical *esprit de corps* among the Remade and Fucktowners.

Ann-Hari hereafter scorns a gendarme-negotiator’s offer to cease hostilities absent recrimination and to discuss the prospect of expediting the Remades’ peonage. She opens fire on the legions of TRT gendarmes who have retreated to, and made a stronghold of, the perpetual train. There unfolds ‘[a] little war’ (*IC*, p. 208) between the strikers-revolters and the TRT gendarmerie: the former group emerges triumphant, hijacking the leviathan train, They render that property of Wrightby, that ferrous lifeblood of the TRT, a ‘new sudden country’ (*IC*, p. 209) and a ‘new town’ (*IC*, pp. 210–211): a wheeled renegopolis.

The strikes enacted by the Fucktowners, free-and-whole men and Remade, along with the events that transpire both during and after their clash with the TRT gendarmerie, are

fragments of an ab-carnivalistic epoch without which this train-renegopolis would not exist. Within the bounds of this ferrous city-state, the free-and-whole are no longer socio-hierarchically superior to the Remade: now, the untrammelled legions of criminals-grotesques are ‘suddenly their equals’ (*IC*, p. 211). Ab-carnivalism has reoriented the course of Bas-Lag’s future, thus evading its Bakhtinian antecedent’s irradicalism—that is, its distinguishing re-establishment of the status quo.

3. The Dawn of the Iron Council

This ab-carnivalism has not yet reached its terminus; beyond this juncture, it becomes formative to the establishment and development of renegopolitan culture.

Renegopolitan solidarity is fostered via the ab-carnivalistic deeds that fuel the strikers’ ‘reversed industry’ (*IC*, p. 211): an endeavour to obstruct the hundreds-strong TRT gendarmes now pursuing them aboard a requisitioned passenger train. Free-and-whole men among their ranks ‘turn their expertise to the road’s dismantling, levering up spikes, shouldering rails and ties piles, scattering the stones’ (*IC*, p. 211). Brakers, drivers and firemen teach the Remade to perform this labour. Such railroad sabotage and pedagogy are ab-carnivalistic eccentricities, for they are unapproved, opposing the authority of the gendarmes, overseers and Wrightby. These railroad-dismantlers slough off the TRT’s ordained, and formerly adhered-to, segregation of whole and Remade labour crews absent licence: they cannot but be participants in ab-carnivalistic familiarity. In light of the high–low dialectic bespoke by wholeness and Remadeness, this labour, moreover, conjures an ab-carnivalistic mesalliance. The mutineers’ disassembly of Wrightby’s transcontinental railroad advances their renegopolitan culture by functioning as a permutation of ab-carnivalistic labour that welcomes, rather than eschews, direct freemen–Remade collaboration. It is a ‘reversed industry’ because of its rootedness in destruction-as-labour and its substitution of the TRT’s discriminatory labour praxis with a contrary alternative.

Whole-and-Remade fucking is an ab-carnivalistic escapade that broadens renegopolitan inclusivity. The foremost determinant of this affair is its enactors’ contravention of the TRT gendarmerie’s laws that uphold New Crobuzoner sexual propriety. Ann-Hari’s *tête-à-tête* with Judah Low—her fellow insurrectionist, a consummate practitioner of somaturgy (that is, the

origination and mastery of golems)—pertinently conveys the rationale for whole-and-Remade fucking’s taboohood in New Crobuzon:

New Crobuzon’s full of it, Ann-Hari says. —Whole-and-Remade fucking. What happens when someone gets the punishment factory [i.e., what happens when someone is Remade], what, always his wife leave him?

—Supposed to. It ain’t decorum.

—They doing it all over the city, like they doing cross-sex, khepri, human, vods.

—True, Judah says. —But you ain’t supposed to admit it. These women [Fucktowners] . . . your women . . . they’re letting us see.²¹ (*IC*, p. 210)

The fucking at issue springs from its participant Remades’ unsanctioned violation of gendarme-enforced TRT laws, insofar as they use their liberation from shackles and stockades to freely approach and interact with the she-prostitutes, or vice versa. The Remade and Fucktowners are hence complicit in ab-carnivalistic familiarity that stimulates renegopolitan rapport because they defy observance of everyday, law- and decorum-based socio-hierarchical distinctions. Such fucking constitutes an ab-carnivalistic *mésalliance*: the Remade men’s penile penetration of the unRemade women’s orifice/s begets a synthesis of antithetical and otherwise segregated bodies, subverting the gendarmerie’s forbidding of such unions. The facticity and, above all, the deliberate visibility of the trainspeople’s anti-gendarme whole-and-Remade fucking qualify it as ab-carnivalistic eccentricity. The conspicuousness of this ab-carnivalistic fucking reifies the prostitutes’ belief that Remades’ pariahdom owing to their thaumaturgy-distorted bodies is unjust. It disseminates their radical embrace of, and commitment to, amity between whole and Remade; it signals their disdain for the TRT and accepted New Crobuzon decorum. The trainsfolk-strikers in question have fundamentally positioned their wedding of lasciviousness to ab-carnivalism as a potent strategy for nurturing renegopolitan equality.

²¹ This overt whole-and-Remade fucking is not freely imitable in New Crobuzon. Although there are establishments in the city-state’s brothel quarter that cater to Remade fetishists, free-and-whole who indulge in these peccadillos do so at their own risk. Any evidence that the Militia procures of whole-and-Remade fucking is susceptible to weaponisation. In *Perdido Street Station*, for instance, David Serachin—an outcast-scientist, a freelance researcher associated with the New Crobuzon University—is blackmailed into serving as a government informant after photo evidence is obtained of him fucking a ‘ruined, cadaverous Remade girl’ in one of the aforesaid establishments: ‘The suited men had shown him their camera. They had told him they would send their pictures to the newspapers and the journals and the university. They had offered him a choice’ (*PSS*, p. 418).

Ab-carnivalism shortly thereafter inspires a reformulation of sociopolitical relations among the free-and-whole railroad workers who partake in the nascent mode of reversed industry. Each night, after labouring on their reversed industry, the men indulge in convivial gatherings—in liaisons, dice-playing, carousing—that metamorphose, that become congresses in which they ‘name each other *brother*’ (*IC*, p. 211, emphasis in original). The implementation of these congresses and brother-as-appellation are ab-carnivalistic eccentricities, for they are rooted in the men’s disavowal of submission to the gendarmes. Such intertwined ab-carnivalistic eccentricities concretise ab-carnivalism’s potential to inform the evolution of a fledgling renegopolitan culture. Serving as mediums for politicised fraternalism alien to everyday life, they signal the inception of organisational and linguistic praxes that facilitate male camaraderie.

One of the fraternal railroaders’ ensuing strategy-congresses becomes a locus of ab-carnivalistic eccentricity when it is disrupted by a band of Fucktowners led by Ann-Hari:

Ann-Hari comes to the meeting and invades a man’s rambled contribution. A wedge of women push into the men. There are those who try to shout Ann-Hari down.

—You ain’t a worker on this road, a man says. —You ain’t nothing but a mountain whore. This ain’t your damn congress, it’s ours.

Ann-Hari speaks something base. She talks in a ragged rhetoric of thrown-together exhortations – a speech that stops Judah.

—not to speak, she says. —If I am not to speak who has the right? What but on us? What but on the backs of me and mine [Fucktowners] have we built these rails? We are become history. There’s no backward now. No way back. You know what we have to do. Where we should go [i.e., onward, deeper into the wilderness].

When she is done no one can speak for seconds, until someone mutters respect.

—Brothers, let’s vote. (*IC*, p. 212)

By means of encroaching on the congress, Ann-Hari and her adherent she-prostitutes repudiate the railroad workers’ self-derived, chauvinist prerogative to determine renegopolitan affairs, thus exploiting ab-carnivalistic eccentricity. Ann-Hari’s protest-speech foregrounds the sex workers’ socio-hierarchical affinity with, and destabilises the unsanctioned authority wielded by, the perpetual train’s newfound congressmen: it is a further ab-carnivalistic eccentricity. A renegopolitan productiveness attends her ab-carnivalistic address. Indeed, Ann-Hari impels the workers-congressmen to concede the Fucktowners’ deservedness of respect (the man who ‘mutters respect’ signals this development) and political inclusivity (the women are transmuted into voters). Ann-Hari’s speech mitigates

renegopolitan sexism; it advances sex-based equality. Anna Despotopoulou posits that since the railway's spatial liminality withstands taxonomisation and disciplinary methods, it constitutes a locale by which ideological instruments of power may be contested and rearranged in fashions that frequently benefit women and enable them to flourish.²² The congressional interventions effected by Ann-Hari and her fellow sex workers are ab-carnivalistic eccentricities that materialise Despotopoulou's observation by thwarting a possible renegopolitan patriarchy and calling forth heightened intersexual solidarity within the bounds of their train-renegopolis.

The normalisation of mixed-sex democracy transmutes the trio of renegopolitan demographics—the sex workers, free-and-whole, Remade—into the Iron Council. Assisted by a band of preternatural natives who loathe the TRT, the Councillors take flight from the gendarmes who confront them (they are accompanied by Wrightby, whose endeavours to negotiate with the freemen and Remade mutineers come to naught). They manoeuvre their hitherto-dormant train-renegopolis into the aforescribed tunnel that the free-and-whole strikers among them have recently finished of their own accord. The trainspeople hereafter propel themselves into an epoch of runagate transgression predicated on their mobilisation of unprecedented ab-carnivalistic comportment.

The newfound mobility of the Iron Council's train-renegopolis is attended by the most profound exemplification of ab-carnivalistic familiarity both among their ranks and in Miéville's novel *tout court*:

They are the cactus-men, the freeanole [free-and-whole] humans, one two scarab-head khepri, camp followers and drifters, a flock of the wyrmen low in the sky staring with the enthusiasm of dogs, stranger races, renegade llogriss and a mute hotchi, and hundreds and hundreds of the Remade, in every shape of flesh. They are firemen, engineers and brakemen, those who were clerks, the few overseers who changed sides early enough, the hunters, bridge-builders, the scouts and scientists who will not leave their [train-]laboratory, the prostitutes, tunnellers, plebeian magicians, verity-gaugers and low-grade hexers, the workless nomads who scavenge the tracks, now become something and hundreds, hundreds of the track-layers. (*IC*, p. 219)

²² Anna Despotopoulou, *Women and the Railway, 1850–1915* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), p. 13.

These Bas-Lagians illustrate ab-carnivalistic familiarity because they comprise a non-approved anti-TRT community that affords them unwonted or otherwise impossible opportunities for untrammelled interactions with one another regardless of official or perceived hierarchical distinctions *apropos* race, class or profession. In light of such egalitarianism, the perpetual train amounts to a revolutionary genus of unBakhtinian carnival square. Ab-carnivalism has called forth a transgressive unification of humans and xenians both within and without the continent-spanning purview of Wrightby's TRT. The Council's ab-carnivalistic familiarity is marked by nigh boundless assimilative potentialities due to its accommodation of manifold styles of renegacy.

This self-christened mass of Iron Councillors formulate an ab-carnivalistic railway-construction praxis that aids their renegopolitan telos of escaping the TRT gendarmerie. Councillors deposit crossties onto the earth at intervals; they hammer rails into them—one, two, three strikes—and thus call forth a railroad-fragment. The perpetual train, the heart of their renegopolis, traverses it. The rails, now bereft of immediate usefulness, are lifted, loaded into carts and hauled hundreds of yards beyond the wheeled leviathan. There, they are hammered into a newly laid concatenation of spaced-out crossties, and another railroad-fragment is born: the train's onward crawl continues (*IC*, p. 219). A determinant of this recurrent labour is ab-carnivalistic eccentricity on the part of the Councillors-graders and -tracklayers:

the grading crews [...] do not sweep away all the bric-a-brac of stones and nature that they would have done before.

[...]

[...] The ties are thrown down much farther apart, only just enough to hold the train. These rails will not last. They are not meant to. The roadbed they [the totality of Iron Councillors] are building is only a sketch, a ghost in the land. (*IC*, p. 219)

The eschewal of stone- and bric-a-brac-sweeping, and the barely adequate crosstie distribution, deviate from TRT labour norms or regulations under the overseers and gendarmes (i.e., at no juncture in *Iron Council* does Miéville specify how grading or tracklaying should be performed, yet this excerpt foregrounds their present strangeness). The Council's graders and tracklayers accordingly employ vague-but-indisputable ab-carnivalistic eccentricities. The tracklayers are responsible for a particularly weighty transgression, in that their ab-carnivalistic labour flouts the TRT's telos: the construction of a lasting railroad. This

Iron Councillor labour eliminates the distance between free-and-whole and a she-Remade: ‘Now the huge Remade woman who was freakish and kept from the tracks before [by TRT gendarmes and overseers] is welcomed with her one-blow hammering’ (*IC*, p. 220). Here, then, is ab-carnivalistic familiarity of the renegopolitan vein. In some measure, the usefulness of the woman’s preternatural capacity for one-strike hammering no doubt influences her embrace by the unRemade railroad workers. Nevertheless, its utility is subordinate to the fact that she now augments the labour-based form of ab-carnivalistic-cum-renegopolitan inclusivity that was initiated by the earlier collaboration between whole men and Remade to effectuate a ‘reversed industry’. The railroad-making approaches espoused by the Iron Councillors are ab-eccentricities that illustrate the agency-reaffirming creativity born of a devotion to radical renegacy. Such ab-Bakhtinian phenomena have profound renegopolitan value: they allow the trainspeople to flee from, and continue their struggle against, the TRT gendarmerie. These ab-carnivalistic eccentricities are industrial strategies for renegopolitan revolution.

All of the renegopolitans who fashion the *ad hoc* railroad by which they flee-resist the gendarmes partake in ab-carnivalistic eccentricity that bespeaks temporal proteanism. Miéville’s self-avowed fascination with ‘dissident railroadism’, as described in an interview with Kristen Tranter, is yoked to this ab-carnivalistic reality:

If you think of the classic train symbol as being [a] thrusting-forward motion through history—indeed, ineluctable fate, and in the U.S. context, manifest destiny (with a lot of the not-very-submerged political stuff that goes with that)—I’ve been very fascinated with the countertradition that is instead obsessed with the fanning out of rails from a station, and/or, above all, with *sidings* as the key symbolic currency of the rail track. And that leads it to use railroads in an exactly contrary symbolic way—to stress contingency, and/or alternative histories and timelines.²³

The Councillors’ ab-carnivalistic railroad-making is a fictional and neoteric brand of dissident railroadism because i) it emblematises alternative histories and timelines—the ‘[m]iles of track, reused, reused, [...] is the train’s future and its present, and it emerges a fraction more scarred as history and is hauled up again and becomes another future’—and ii) it yields ‘a

²³ Kirsten Tranter, ‘An Interview with China Miéville’, *Contemporary Literature*, 53 (2012), 417–436 (p. 427, emphasis in original). In the original text, the formation ‘and/or’ contains spaces (i.e., ‘and / or’). These have been removed to enhance the passage’s readability.

moment of railroad' that is 'contingent and fleeting' (*IC*, p. 220). The fugitives' method of railroad construction thus comprises a series of ab-carnivalistic eccentricities that betoken and reaffirm their prerogative to reorient their future. By engaging in such ab-carnivalistic industry, the Iron Councillors impart to their renegopolitan existence an empowering mutability: they generate a number of new possibilities while deferring, rather than extinguishing, others.

When a he-Councillor addresses the mixed-sex attendees at an ensuing mass meeting as 'brothers', an exasperated she-Councillor chastises him, prompting him to exercise a corrective strain of verbal ab-carnivalistic eccentricity: '—Brothers, brothers. . . —I ain't your brother, a woman shouts. —All right bloody hell *sisters* then, and everyone is laughing. —Sisters, sisters . . . (*IC*, p. 221, emphasis in original). 'Brothers' is a well-intentioned honorific: the he-Councillor who utters it does so with the intent of respectfully addressing his fellow renegopolitans of both sexes. But as the unnamed she-Councillor's protestation against its use at the present meeting demonstrates, it implicitly marginalises the train-renegopolis's women. 'Brother/s' is an honorific that neglects their contributions to both the genesis and prolongation of their renegade city-state, for it is man-oriented. The he-Councillor's immediate redressing of her grievance by eschewing 'brothers'-as-honorific in favour of 'sisters'-as-honorific proclaims his devotion to anti-gendarmerie solidarity: it is an ab-carnivalistic eccentricity. A novel, more compassionate species of honorific etiquette has been birthed. Iron Councillors hereafter call one another 'sister/s' irrespective of their sex; 'Brothers . . . sisters . . . we crossed Weather Wrightby' (*IC*, p. 221), Uzman illustratively says to the meeting attendees – a further ab-carnivalistic eccentricity. The normalisation of the honorific 'sister/s' rectifies the he-Councillors' unwitting marginalisation of their she-compeers by addressing them as 'brother/s'. Although its denotative meaning positions it as a womanly genus of honorific, its employment by the fugitive trainspeople renders it unsexed and, therefore, inclusive. The unnamed woman's ab-carnivalistic eccentricity has consolidated the development of intersexual fellowship and equality in the Iron Council's newly itinerant renegopolis. Above all, it marks the dawn of an enduring verbal-ideological decorum among the renegopolitans: more than twenty years after the he-Councillor uttered it as a form of propitiation, 'sister' remains a popular honorific (*IC*, pp. 125, 293, 355, 417,

435, 444). A declaration of sisterhood proves to be the catalyst for a graciously desexed speech praxis that far exceeds the spatiotemporal limits of the ab-carnivalism that inspires it.

A pastoral apparition of renegopolitan ab-carnivalism materialises during the Iron Councillors' westward journey to the Cacotopic Stain—uncharted Rohagi wilderness suffused with the matter-altering energy Torque—amid their flight from the TRT gendarmerie and now, too, the New Crobuzon Militia. Its lifeblood is a spontaneous dance competition by which the runaway society of trainspeople indulge the rapacity of motion-demons (extraphysical kinetophages):

If Councillors detrain, demons pullulate about their feet, eating the echoes of their steps. One woman dances, and the air goes alive with the rapture of motion-demons now-seen-now unseen gorging on her tempo. Soon the perpetual train is girdled with shuffling figures: Remade, the freeanole women who were once whores, cactacae overcoming their grimness. They dance by the train, keeping pace in capers, in barley-mows and lillygins. Their feet are thronged by demons catching the light. It is a contest: the most complex, repeated, perfect rhythms are the best food.

[...] [A]round the suddenly docile iron beast are hundreds of celebrants kicking up summer dust. (*IC*, p. 228)

The Iron Councillors' dancing ludically challenges the TRT-mandated segregation of Remade and free-and-whole; it is a vivid display of their renegopolitan fidelity to egalitarianism on behalf of defying two authorities: gendarmes and Militia. The trainsfolk here partake in radical, ebullient ab-carnivalistic eccentricity. Their dance contest is a cathartic affair, demonstrating that Remade-free-and-whole inclusivity has transcended the aforescribed realms of labour and politics. This ab-carnivalistic dancing captures the affecting, extraordinary degree to which camaraderie between the thaumaturgically monstified criminals and the whole has developed, as its teloi are jollification and indulging the motion-demons' appetite.

Their ab-carnivalism via this impromptu dance-game is 'a strange pastoral, a harvest procession it looks like, amid scruffs of pampas grass and the dead creeks' (*IC*, p. 228).

Reginald Shepherd offers a trenchant account of pastoral:

Historically, pastoral has been a literary genre or mode celebrating the idealized innocent pleasures and joys of country life, with all traces of what [Karl] Marx called the idiocy of rural life effaced, the squalor and brute labor erased. As such, it is always

an implicit critique of the corruptions and sorrows of city life. [...] The pastoral is by definition the product of city-dwellers, looking back with a wistful nostalgia at a life they have never led, a world they have never inhabited. It is a mode of alienation and exile.²⁴

The Iron Councillors' ab-carnivalistic dancing proclaims their experiencing of an intratextually reified pastoral: it celebrates the idealised innocent pleasures and joys of country life; it implicitly critiques the corruption and sorrows of life in New Crobuzon because it is inflected by the trainspeople's rebellion against two now-collaborating contingents of officialdom that engender and perpetuate them (i.e., gendarmes and Militia). The 'strange' character of the Council's pastoral arises from their leviathanic train accommodating it despite embodying that to which it is notionally opposed: urbanity. 'In literature as in life, the art of urban pastoral', argue Kevin R. McNamara and Timothy Gray, 'inheres in ways of seeing that find or create within the city spaces or images conducive to pastoral moods'.²⁵ Given this definition, the Iron Council's ab-carnivalistic dancing 'by' and 'around' the wheeled behemoth marks an urban permutation of intratextually reified pastoral. For Terry Gifford, 'pastoral is "carnavalesque" in Bakhtin's sense of playfully subverting what is currently taken for granted: the hegemony of the urban establishment'.²⁶ Nevertheless, the Iron Councillors' ab-carnivalistic pastoral both playfully and seriously subverts the hegemony of an urban establishment: it coincides with their flight from the Militia who New Crobuzon's government have charged with reclaiming Wrightby's train. The fugitives' ab-carnivalistic dancing illustrates the means by which a material, urban pastoral can assume an extra-Bakhtinian and, hence, -subversive utility—that is, the enablement of anti-authority togetherness and latitude.

The period of ab-carnivalism that was instituted when the aggrieved Fucktowners held a strike against the abusive TRT freemen-workers ends when they pass into the Cacotopic Stain's margins via a hill-passage that they seal behind them. Indeed, this consummates their

²⁴ Reginald Shepherd, 'Toward an Urban Pastoral', in *Orpheus in the Bronx: Essays on Identity, Politics, and the Freedom of Poetry* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2007), pp. 56–64 (p. 63).

²⁵ Kevin R. McNamara and Timothy Gray, 'Some Versions of Urban Pastoral', in *The Cambridge Companion to the City in Literature*, ed. by Kevin R. McNamara (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp. 245 – 260 (p. 246).

²⁶ Terry Gifford, *Pastoral*, 2nd edn (Abingdon: Routledge, 2020), p. 24.

sought-after escape from the gendarmes and Militia. The lasting effects of the Iron Councillors' engagement in renegopolitan ab-carnivalism hereafter become patent.

The dissolution of the TRT is among the weightiest corollaries of the prevenient ab-carnivalism. The TRT's funds stall after its investors receive news of the Iron Council's revolt and hijacking of the perpetual train (*IC*, p. 245). Despite frantic endeavours to salvage the TRT by means of increased wages and an unmerciful proliferation in Remaking, it ultimately meets its demise because New Crobuzon's capital flight is rendered unsustainable (*IC*, p. 245). Labour on Wrightby's once-flourishing railroad is truncated; it is unceremoniously abandoned; the tracks become quasi-ossified things (*IC*, p. 245). The Iron Councillors' successful ab-carnivalistic flight from the gendarmes and the New Crobuzon Militia—that is, their disappearance into the Cacotopic Stain along with Wrightby's train—propels the TRT-born and -dependent boomtowns into ruin:

The thrown-up towns and hamlets of the plains, and the herds of beef and crossbred meat-beasts, the gunfighters and mercenaries, the trappers, the populace of that mongrel of money and wild, had evaporated, in months. The waddies were gone, the horse-gangsters, the whores. (*IC*, p. 391)

The Councillors did not seek to engender the collapse of the TRT and its interrelated boomtowns via their aforescribed epoch of renegopolitan ab-carnivalism. This truth is subordinate to another: the trainsfolk's renegecy-fuelled ab-carnivalism is a profound determinant of Bas-Lag's socio-economic landscape and, hence, its future. Indeed, the consummation of Wrightby's transcontinental railroad would bring forth a neoteric Bas-Lag: 'Wrightby [...] would plough a train-thin strip and siphon money to the west and suck it back again. He would change the world and New Crobuzon' (*IC*, p. 440). As such, the trainspeople's ab-carnivalism is irreducible to a method of nurturing renegopolitan, anti-officialdom solidarity that cleaves to radical teloi. It is a far-reaching web of transgressions; it yields unsought-but-momentous change.

The weightiest corollary of the Councillors' ab-carnivalism is their arrival in the Cacotopic Stain, for this sparks a challenge-freighted epoch by which they procure a new, better life. The period under discussion spans more than two years. It is the fragment of Bas-Lagian

history during which the Iron Council traverses the Cacotopic Stain's margins as they quest for a land in which they can settle:

They had taken their train without intent between the ranks of feuding forest things that pattered them with darts and stones: animal-men accused them of invasion. [...] The Iron Councillors learnt new languages, trade and politesse with brute and urgent efficiency.

[...] There had been sacrifices – severe, dreadful prices to pay when they passed unknowing into this or that little despotism, crossed some potentate or quasigodling thing. [...]

A landscape that punished outsiders. They were picked off by animals, by cold and heat. They starved, were sent to shivering deaths by illness, died of thirst when their watercarts got lost. They made themselves learn, constructing their absconder railway.

And they had warred themselves, when they had to, against tribes who would not take offerings for the right to pass into their lands. There was a time, which the Councillors described briefly in shame – The Idiocy, they called it – when the train itself had been ripped apart by civil war, over strategy, over how to continue. [...]

But at last [they stumbled across] the grassland [in which they would settle]. They had mapped and made peace with the neighbours they found. (*IC*, pp. 289–290)

These tribulations instantiate that the trainspeople's renegopolitan ab-carnivalism is neither a direct nor immediate path to the sequestered, idyllic vein of life for which they hanker. Nevertheless, this does not relegate it to a failure: it propels them into heuristic adversities. That is, it conjures stepping stones to their fashioning of a transCacotopos 'grassland sanctuary' (*IC*, p. 297) in which they 'buil[d] a life, being delegates, arguing, voting, disagreeing and making things work' (*IC*, p. 290) for over twenty years. The Iron Council's renegopolitan ab-carnivalism is followed by an epoch of Cacotopic hardship that proves to be a prerequisite for lasting, aspiration-satisfying change.

A final corollary of the Iron Council's ab-carnivalism is that its legacy inflects anti-government ideology in New Crobuzon more than two decades after its terminus. 'If there's no Iron Council,' Madeleina explains to Ori, 'then we [New Crobuzon's commonalty] ain't never took power. But if there is, and there *is*, we did it before, we can do it again. [...] It's [i.e., the Iron Council is] coming back, and even just knowing that's a godsdamned inspiration' (*IC*, pp. 302–303, emphasis in original). The facticity of the Councillors' renegopolitan ab-carnivalism, Madeleina's words demonstrate, carries great cultural import because it is a sanguine precedent for a commonalty-effected rebellion against New Crobuzon's totalitarian regime. Stated otherwise, the trainspeople's ab-carnivalism gestures

toward the possibility of a modern successor engendering radical, enduring social change in New Crobuzon. The Collectivists adore the Council for precisely this reason—a fact demonstrated when members of the Caucus’s delegate council are greeted by Iron Councillors amid the Collective–Parliament civil war: ‘One by one, the Caucusers of the New Crobuzon Collective gripped the hands or tail-like limb of the Councillors, awed, abject, let out murmurs of solidarity. “Decades,” one whispered [...] “You came back. [...] [W]here you been? We been *waiting*”’ (*IC*, p. 376, emphasis in original). The Iron Councillors’ renegopolitan ab-carnivalism has scarred Bas-Lagian history to such a degree that it has evaded reducibility to an affair bereft of relevance to the contemporary age. It has perforated the membrane that separates the past and the present, boasting a marked sociocultural value: shaping the hearts and minds of New Crobuzon’s insurrectionists.

The ab-carnivalistic modalities of strike action and radicalism implemented by the Fucktowners, freemen and Remade have sown the seeds of the Iron Council’s birth, development and, above all procurement of an idyllic life. Its Bakhtinian-Miévillean workings—its fidelity to non-approved transgression, its sharpening of mundane socio-hierarchical dialectics—have rendered it more productive than Bakhtinian carnival by far.

4. Homeward Bound

Transpiring more than twenty years after its forerunner, the Iron Council’s second epoch of ab-carnivalism partially coincides with the first and last of the New Crobuzon Collective. Miéville imparts to *Iron Council* a conclusion by which this neoteric ab-carnivalism shapes both their train-renegopolis and its cultural import in extraordinary fashions.

Having devoted the preceding decades to serving as the Iron Council’s bard in New Crobuzon, Judah returns to his trainsfolk-kin bearing a warning: New Crobuzon’s government has discovered their whereabouts and dispatched Militia to slaughter them. Judah’s attendant exhortations—that his fellow Councillors should take flight, settle elsewhere, become hidden once more—ultimately fall on deaf ears. His report of the burgeoning political strife that presently saturates New Crobuzon has awakened within many of the trainspeople a yearning to intervene. They are bent on staging a revolutionary expedition to New Crobuzon. The Iron Councillors forsake their hard-earned arcadia and

variously depart for New Crobuzon behind, alongside, aboard and before their perpetual train-renegopolis. They pass into the fringes of the Cacotopic Stain, retracing the path by which the Iron Council's founding men and women negotiated that Torque-steeped land. The route is long and arduous: there are high prices to be paid for travelling it. A number of the self-*deracinated* trainspeople are slain by the region's fauna; others find themselves afflicted with Torque to such a degree that they mutate into neoteric things. The Iron Councillors are dogged, and they eventually succeed in crossing the threshold between the Cacotopos and Eastern Rohagi, hence satisfying the first leg of their journey.

A vivid apparition of ab-carnivalism subsequently materialises when the Councillors stumbles across horde of fugitives from the now-moribund New Crobuzon Collective. Ab-carnivalism here fashions a sudden, albeit potent, Collectivist–Iron Councillor rapport. A contingent of ex-Collectivists serve as an untrained workforce that succours the Iron Councillors, that facilitates their revolutionary expedition to New Crobuzon by clearing the railway lines (*IC*, p. 466); others launch Councillor-addressed letters into the train-renegopolis's windows, and the passengers read-communalise them; a number of former Collectivists toss victuals and flowers to Councillors; some runaways leap aboard the wheeled leviathan, while the Councillors who follow it on foot set about 'embrac[ing] them, merging' (*IC*, p. 447); and there arises an indulgence in seditionist deeds:

figures [erstwhile Collectivists] on the trackside darkness [were] waving adzes and thick twig brooms, shouting for the train to *Go on, go on* and telling it *Welcome home*. [...]

The Crobuzoners waved their hats and scarves. *Run come home*, one shouted. They threw dried petals on the tracks.

'Low the Golem-man!' one woman shouted in her old voice as they [the Councillors] went past. 'He's been prowling around, getting everything ready for you! Come faster!'

[...]

'Don't fear,' someone shouted. 'Listen, we're only hiding, us Collectivists, we're waiting, we're behind the militia lines waiting for you. (*IC*, pp. 446–447, emphasis in original)

The aforedescribed phenomena constitute ab-carnivalistic eccentricities, for they are unauthorised, hitherto-impossible face-to-face displays of the runaway Collectivists' solidarity with the Iron Council and, thus, hostility toward New Crobuzon's regime. Ab-carnivalistic familiarity is signalled by the Collective-deserters' sought-after, unapproved

union between themselves and the Councillors on behalf of their anti-government comradeship, absent regard for socio-hierarchical distinctions. The perpetual train is the indispensable locus of this ab-carnivalistic familiarity; it is a vehicular, authentically transgressive substitute for a Bakhtinian carnival square. Ab-carnivalism has brought forth an amicable cross-pollination of unsuccessful revolutionaries and aspirant revolutionaries, that is, of quasi-renegopolitans and holo-renegopolitans: the ex-Collectivists and the Iron Councillors, respectively. By enabling the fugitive New Crobuzoners to lay eyes on, and freely interact with, the mythical Iron Council, this ab-carnivalism affords them some measure of consolation. It positions the trainspeople as a suddenly tangible emblem of popular hope. To the erstwhile Collectivists, the Council's ab-carnivalistic arrival heralds the consummation of the ab-carnivalistic revolution that they initiated in New Crobuzon. The Iron Council's reappearance has begotten a sanguine marriage of past, present and envisaged permutations of renegopolitan ab-carnivalism.

The terminal specimen of renegopolitan ab-carnivalism unfolds as the Council advances toward a within-sight New Crobuzon, toward thousands of Militia who await its coming:

The [first of the train's] engine[‘s], a fetish head, carved with stories, hung with animal spoils, [was] crowded with the toughest warriors, the biggest Remade, the cactacae with scramasaxes ready, roaring, feted by New Crobuzon refugees who ran alongside, who cheered desperately and threw confetti.

The second engine, all its follow-ons, the whole tracktop town [had] become militant, become its weapons, the Iron Council [now] become a fighting city. Its wheels beat the iron, smoke gouting from its chimneys, everyone poised to fight, with no plan but the imbecile bravery of *forward*. (*IC*, p. 452, emphasis in original)

The Iron Councillors' espousal of bellicosity—their transmutation into a dogged, renegopolis-borne military—and their cheering- and confetti-expressed feting by the Crobuzoner refugees reify a popular devotion to revolutionary politics. As such, these acts are manifestations of ab-carnivalistic eccentricity. The collaboration between the Crobuzoner runaways and the trainsfolk despite their quotidian separation from, and social difference to, one another is predicated on an untrammelled, dissident inclusivity, thus registering ab-carnivalistic familiarity. Ab-carnivalism has generated a Militia-facing and -defiant spectacle: for the New Crobuzoners and Iron Councillors alike, it is an instrument for promulgating their subordination of geographical and sociocultural dissimilitude to radical solidarity. This

ab-carnivalistic amalgamation of the trainsfolk's bellicosity and the refugees' fete-hosting is a cathartic prelude to a long-envisioned satisfaction of ameliorative hopes. The solemnity to which the Iron Councillors cleave dovetails with the New Crobuzoners' festiveness: the result is a puissant emblem of foreign–native anti-authoritarianism.

At this juncture, the Councillors' faculty for exercising ab-carnivalism is truncated. Having laid eyes on the thousands-strong Militia stationed before the entrance to New Crobuzon, Judah apprehends the Iron Council's commitment to insurrection as futile. He calls forth a golem that extracts both the wheeled renegopolis and its passengers-inhabitants from linear time, purloining their material facticity. The animate figure has thrust the Councillors into a 'synchronic jail' (*IC*, p. 469). To invoke the words of the unidentified New Crobuzoner whose voice Méville soon thereafter renders a conduit for narrative, '*that moment [has] become a place, that history instant a splinter in now, under now's skin. [...] No one can touch it. Everyone tries. Time slips around it*' (*IC*, p. 470, emphasis in original). Judah has betrayed his fellow trainspeople, deferring the enactment of their imminent revolutionary struggle and, by extension, the continuation of their coterminous ab-carnivalism for an unspecified duration. Their reanimation, Judah hopes, will transpire in a Bas-Lagian epoch marked by circumstances conducive to their defeat of the Militia and New Crobuzon's regime.

Accompanying the spatiotemporal liminality into which the perpetual train and the Councillors are propelled by Judah's golem are a pair of inextricably entwined ab-carnivalistic *mésalliances*: thereness and not-thereness, and past and present. Both *mésalliances* qualify as ab-carnivalistic because they eliminate the theoretical and empirical distance between their constituent, antithetical phenomena according to a postponed insurrectionist agenda. The crux of these *mésalliances* is their divorcement from the Iron Councillors' autonomy. Ann-Hari tacitly expounds this problematisation of ab-carnivalistic praxis via her impassioned exchange with Judah moments before she executes him for his treachery:

'You've no fucking right, Judah. . .'

'You'd have died.'

'*Maybe.*' She spit the word. A long quiet followed. 'Maybe we'd have died. But you don't know. You don't know there weren't Collectivists waiting behind them militia

ready to take them, now all scared off because of what you done. You don't know that they weren't there, you don't know who wouldn't have been inspired when we come, too late or *not*. See? Too late or not, they might have been. See, Judah? You see? Whether we died or not.'

'I had . . . it's the *Council*. I had to make them, you, safe. . .'

'It's not yours to choose, Judah. Not yours.'

[...] Judah stared at her with patience, a readiness.

'The thing in you. . . You did not create the Iron Council, Judah Low. It was never yours.' She stepped back and raised the pistol [that she held] till he stared into its mouth. 'And maybe you'll die not understanding, Judah. [...] You don't get to choose. You don't decide when is the right time, when it fits your story. *This was the time we were here*. We knew. We decided. And you don't know, and now we don't either, we'll never know what would have happened. You stole all those people from themselves.' (IC, pp. 462–463, emphasis in original)

The thereness–not-thereness and past–present ab-carnivalistic *mésalliances* yield interCouncillor strife owing to their inexorable theft of revolutionary autonomy. Doing so, Ann-Hari's words exemplify, constitutes a beyond-the-pale breach of the democratic principles that inform the Councillors' itinerant ferro-renegopolis. The ab-carnivalistic *mésalliances* in question cannot but be deleterious: they derail the revolution to which the trainsfolk have committed themselves, subordinating their renegopolitan prerogatives of democracy to Judah's misguided saviourhood. This Councillor-golemist has not only betrayed his kin but also the principles of communal freedom and collaboration integral to ab-carnivalism.

However, an unexpected, solaceful outcome of the ab-carnivalistic *mésalliances* traceable to Judah is the Iron Council's metamorphosis into a locus of New Crobuzoner ab-carnivalism. This renegopolis accommodates ab-carnivalistic familiarity: multifarious New Crobuzoners—'[o]ld women, young, men, human cactus *khepri hotchi vodyanoi* and *Remade*', and '*scores of children*'—for whom contact with one another would doubtless be improbable or impossible in their city-state due to established, officialdom-policed socio-hierarchical barriers visit it for pro-Councillor/anti-government catharsis '*despite the penalties*' (IC, p. 470, emphasis in original). Such ab-carnivalistic familiarity, moreover, begets whole–Remade equality: '*Here in the environs of the train those Remade who make the dangerous pilgrimage are given something, are for these yards around this moment equals*' (IC, p. 470, emphasis in original). The visitors indulge in behaviour divorced from the realm of quotidian life: a popular tradition is to wave one's hand between a motionless bullet

and the Councillor-wielded rifle from whose barrel it was fired and hangs six-inches removed; others deposit written pleas around the Iron Council, come to pray before it, treat it as a ferrous playground (*IC*, p. 470). These Council-adjacent deeds are non-approbated, springing imprecisely-but-incontestably from their performers' dissident politics—that is, they are ab-carnivalistic eccentricities. The stasis-afflicted Iron Council inspires ab-carnivalism by which New Crobuzon's insurrectionist masses demonstrate their solidarity with its passengers-residents. This ab-carnivalism bridges the gap between the past, the present and the future; it foregrounds and contributes to the timelessness of revolutionism. To exercise the sanguine words of the unidentified New Crobuzoner–narrator, '*The Iron Council is not stopped it is onrushing it is immanent and we see it only in this one moment. [...] These paused Council cars wait to salvage us. [...] [T]hey [the men and women of the train] are always coming*' (*IC*, p. 471 emphasis in original). Judah's betrayal of the Iron Councillors by means of his time-golem intervention has transmuted them into a popular, consolatory emblem of approaching revolution. In this regard, the thereness–not-thereness and past–present ab-carnivalistic *mésalliances* have expectedly aided New Crobuzon's insurrectionist commonalty.

'Culture is an activity', argues Arif Dirlik, 'in which the social relations that are possible but absent, because they have been displaced or rendered impossible (or "utopian") by existing social relations, are as fundamental as the relations whose existence it affirms'.²⁷ The extralinear temporality that Judah's time golem foists on the Iron Council generates revolutionary uncertainty—i.e., an extratextual possibility of a successful or failed revolution—by which it becomes a fiction-based analogue to Dirlik's thesis. Indeed, to the radicals among New Crobuzon's commonalty, the possible-yet-absent egalitarian interrelationships that might be reified by the Councillors' postponed revolution are displaced, rather than extinguished, thus proving as fundamental to culture as those oppressive, officialdom-dictated social interrelationships whose existence it affirms.²⁸

²⁷ Arif Dirlik, 'Culturalism as Hegemonic Ideology and Liberating Practice', *Cultural Critique*, no. 6 (1987), 13–50 (pp. 14–15).

²⁸ 'Your order is built on sand', an edition of the seditionist newssheet *Runagate Rampant* declaims, addressing New Crobuzon's Parliament's loyalists. 'Tomorrow the Iron Council will move on again, and to your horror it will proclaim with its whistle blaring: We say: *We were, we are, we will be*' (*IC*, p. 469, emphasis in original).

The quasi-ending with which Miéville furnishes *Iron Council* establishes a buoyant correspondence between ab-carnivalism and the promise of revolution, for it echoes Bakhtin's assertion that 'the carnival sense of the world [...] knows no period, and is, in fact, hostile to any sort of *conclusive conclusion*: all endings are merely new beginnings; carnival images are reborn again and again' (*PDP*, p. 165, emphasis in original).

5. Two Tales of Renegopolitan Ab-Carnivalism

Ab-carnivalism has made profound contributions to the establishment and shaping of the New Crobuzon Collective's and Iron Council's renegopolitan cultures.

While the Collective's members are racially multifarious, its renegopolitan culture is freighted with tensions that pre-existed its districts-and-barricades-comprised renegopolis. This is evinced by the free-and-whole who refuse to collaborate with the Remade; by the Collectivist negotiators' begrudging alliance with the handlers; by the heterosexual Collectivists' repugnance toward the dollyboys (the 'exasperated affection' that these gay men garner from their insurrectionists-peers diminishes their perceived inequality, but does not eliminate it); and by the fervent debates *apropos* the deployment of pure-race squads. The cohort of Collectivists or sympathiser punks who debase the godling-of-patience-dedicated slow-sculptures in Ludmead manifest an anti-official cultural aesthetic that dovetails with the their yearning to expedite a successful revolution. The New Crobuzon Collective's ab-carnivalistic cultural similarities to the Paris Commune generates an association between Bas-Lag and the extratextual world that gestures to the manner in which Miéville's speculative fiction revitalises the Parisian rebels' legacy. Like the Commune, the Collective ultimately fails to usher in lasting species of radical change; nonetheless, it beneficially foregrounds the truth that the engenderment of coterminously anti-quotidian and -government cultural configurations is achievable.

Ab-carnivalism serves to both originate and mould the Iron Council's culture in much the same way as that of the Collective. The ab-carnivalistic strikes implemented by the disparate contingents of yet-to-be Councillors—the Fucktowners, the enslaved Remade and the free-and-whole railroad workers—prompts the Remade boy's public beating and, hence, the impromptu revolt without which the Council's train-renegopolis would not exist. In other

words, these interrelated strikes register ab-carnivalism's function as the prelude to the birth of the wheeled renegopolis and, in an equally salient fashion, the Iron Council itself. Two parallels between the Collective's renegopolis and that of the Council have thus emerged: i) both proceed from spontaneous violence between low-ranking cohorts and officials, and ii) the former's victory paves the way for their birth. The Council's renegopolitan notions and praxes as regards fucking, labour, socio-hierarchical orders, democracy, race and language are variously born from ab-carnivalistic phenomena. The result is an unqualified renegopolitan form of egalitarian culture, as opposed to the quasi-egalitarian alternative possessed by the New Crobuzon Collective. The evocative 'strange pastoral' in which the Iron Councillors partake is an ab-carnivalistic affair that bespeaks the culmination of their renegopolitan culture's development. That is, it reaffirms their fidelity to the virtues and hardships of a renegopolitan life: an egalitarian culture and the threat of official retribution for being part of it, respectively. The two decades of contentment that the Councillors experience in their post-Cacotopos breed of grassland sanctuary imparts visibility to their ab-carnivalism's fruitfulness. The Iron Council's journey to New Crobuzon in hopes of succouring that Collectivist revolution evokes the interplay between renegopoleis and ab-carnivalism *par excellence*. The runaway Collectivists' meeting and interaction with the trainsfolk during that journey marks a harmonious synthesis of New Crobuzoner and Iron Councillor culture: a product of their mutual inflection by radical politics. The unknowable duration of the Iron Council's extraction from linear time conjures a *sui generis* ab-carnivalism in Miéville's oeuvre, for it boasts a yet-to-be-fulfilled radicality that perpetuates New Crobuzon's culture of insurrectionism.

In an interview with *Boston Review*, Miéville expounds the strategy for quotidian amelioration advocated by *Salvage*—the self-proclaimed 'journal of revolutionary arts and letters'²⁹ that he co-founded and edits, and to which he himself has contributed essays:

The political task is to operate with two horizons: that of the immediate aim, the shorter-term, potential gain, the moment-by-moment; and that further, the utter, unsayable. We have talked about this in *Salvage*: if you hold, as we do, that—whatever reforms we can and must fight to instantiate—this system can't ultimately be reformed out of being one of exploitation and oppression, then we have to mediate that fight for quotidian amelioration with a strategy of tension, an unflinching antinomianism. To

²⁹ 'About Salvage', *Salvage* <<https://salvage.zone/about-2/>> [accessed 20 February 2025].

reclaim the slogan from the defeated attempt to oppose Greek austerity measures, an *Oxi* ('no') underlying all.³⁰

The ab-carnivalism by which the New Crobuzon Collective and the Iron Council have produced renegopolitan cultures is ultimately traceable to their Salvager-reminiscent consciousness that a tension-based strategy of resistance to established systems of exploitation and oppression is needed to effect radical ameliorative change. The differences between these spatially and temporally isolated Bas-Lagian cultures are eclipsed by the facticity of ab-carnivalism's power to generate them in the first place. Ab-carnivalism has brought forth liberating styles of renegade city and culture by transcending Bakhtinian carnival's licensed, status quo-reinforcing transgressions.

³⁰ 'A Strategy for Ruination: An Interview with China Miéville', *Boston Review* <<https://www.bostonreview.net/articles/literature-culture-china-mieville-strategy-ruination/>> [accessed 23 June 2025], emphasis in original. This interview is also featured in *Global Dystopias*, ed. by Junot Díaz, *Boston Review* (2017).

Chapter Three: An Enchiridion to Linguistic Conflict: Heteroglossic Bearings on Bakhtinian Carnivalism and Ab-Carnivalism in *Embassytown*

*A picture held us captive. And we couldn't get outside it, for it lay in our language, and language seemed only to repeat it to us inexorably.*¹

—Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (1953)

‘Carnavalesque discourse’, Julia Kristeva asserts, ‘breaks through the laws of a language censored by grammar and semantics and, at the same time, is a social and political protest’.² In the previous chapters, Deeba and Tanner have appositely nurtured triumphant ab-carnivalistic rebellions via a manipulation of *parrhesia* in *Un Lun Dun* and *The Scar*, respectively, whereas the eponymous trainsfolk-radicals of *Iron Council* have consolidated their ab-carnivalistic solidarity via the transition from ‘brother’- to ‘sister’-as-honorific. In Miéville’s prodigious corpus, the SF novel *Embassytown* bears his most complex engagement with ab-carnivalism’s faculty for instrumentalising and reshaping language. *Embassytown* is predicated on a language in which words constitute their referents.

To put it differently, this language precludes polysemy owing to its unmediated interrelationship between word, thought and reality as perceived by its speakers: the formidable species of ‘insect-horse-coral-fan things’³ styled Ariekei or Hosts. Its attendant determination of thought and perception renders it an embodiment of what is variously termed the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, Whorfianism, or linguistic relativity. Indeed, this Ariekei language marks a fictional, empiricised variant of the fallacious contention that Benjamin Lee Whorf expounds in ‘Science and Linguistics’ (1940):

We cut nature up, organize it into concepts, and ascribe significances as we do, largely because we are parties to an agreement to organize it in this way—an agreement that holds throughout our speech community and is codified in the patterns of our language. The agreement is, of course, an implicit and unstated one, BUT ITS TERMS ARE

¹ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. by G. E. M. Anscombe, P. M. S. Hacker and Joachim Schulte, rev. 4th edn (Chichester: Blackwell, 2009), p. 53e, emphasis in original.

² Julia Kristeva, ‘Word, Dialogue and Novel’, in *The Kristeva Reader*, ed. by Toril Moi (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), pp. 34–61 (p. 36).

³ China Miéville, *Embassytown* (London: Macmillan, 2011), p. 141. Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text.

ABSOLUTELY OBLIGATORY; we cannot talk at all except by subscribing to the organization and classification of data which the agreement decrees.⁴

In *Embassytown*, the correlation between Whorfianism and the Ariekei's idiosyncratic language proceeds from a conscious decision on Miéville's part, by his own admission. As Miéville remarks in a conversation with Joshua Miller:

One of the things fiction does, it allows you to take theories that you know are false and use them for narrative as if they weren't. In the case of *Embassytown*, although it's not the main organizing principle, there is an inference that works within the context of this particular world. Take, for example, the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, which is essentially saying that language determines thought, that your thought patterns are created by your language. I had some pushback on this from some linguists and anthropologists, telling me that the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis is wrong. I know the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis is wrong. What I thought was that it would make an interesting peg for a story. You can literalize these thought experiments in a way that I find very powerful.⁵

Given its partial rootedness in Whorfianism, the Hosts' language in *Embassytown* necessitates truth-claims, its function as the sole means of verbal communication at their disposal accounting for its name: Language (the capitalised word-initial is constant).

The present chapter maintains that disruptions of the familiar and putatively fixed mechanisms of Language in *Embassytown* are structured by an interplay between heteroglossia—the linguistic phenomenon that Bakhtin propounds in 'Discourse in the Novel' (1934–1935)—and carnivalism of Bakhtinian and ab-varieties. This heteroglossia–carnivalism interplay casts a light on Miéville's manipulation of the fantastic aesthetic to radicalise the transgressive potentialities of thought and language. At bottom, the current chapter's Bakhtinian–Miévillean focus transcends the analytical methodologies that have thus far been deployed to examine Language in *Embassytown*.⁶

⁴ Benjamin Lee Whorf, 'Science and Linguistics', in *Language, Thought, and Reality: Selected Writings of Benjamin Lee Whorf*, 2nd edn, ed. by John B. Carroll, Stephen C. Levinson and Penny Lee (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2012), pp. 265–280 (p. 272).

⁵ Joshua L. Miller, 'Metaphor is Everything: A Conversation with China Miéville', *Michigan Quarterly Review*, 58 (2019), 595–604 (p. 598).

⁶ See Travis Alexander, 'Speaking Fees: Capital, Colony, and Reference in China Miéville's *Embassytown*', *LIT: Literature Interpretation Theory*, 31 (2020), 222–241; Adam Głaz, 'Reversals and Paradoxes: China Miéville's Anti-Language', *Extrapolation*, 56 (2015), 335–352; Joseph P. Weakland, "'Forked Tongues': Languages of Estrangement in China Miéville's *Embassytown*", *Science Fiction Studies*, 42 (2015), 78–98; Gerard Hynes, 'Language Makes and Breaks Worlds', in *Revisiting Imaginary Worlds: A Subcreation Studies Anthology*, ed. by Mark J. P. Wolf (New York: Routledge, 2017), pp. 276–293; Aleksandr Kolesnikov, 'The

1. A War of Words: Centripetalism and Centrifugalism

Before turning to *Embassytown*, an exposition of heteroglossia is in order. ‘Bakhtin had [...] a perfect understanding of language as a system’,⁷ notes Krystyna Pomorska. In ‘Discourse in the Novel’, he illustratively posits two inextricable, counterposed phenomena around which it is structured: centripetal and centrifugal forces. Bakhtin asserts that the former endeavours to beget ‘concrete verbal and ideological unification and centralization, which develop in vital connection with the processes of sociopolitical and cultural centralization’.⁸ Bakhtin identifies variegated specimens of centripetal forces in European language:

Aristotelian poetics, the poetics of Augustine, the poetics of the medieval church, of ‘the one language of truth,’ the Cartesian poetics of neoclassicism, the abstract grammatical universalism of Leibniz (the idea of a ‘universal grammar’), Humboldt’s insistence on the concrete—all these, whatever their differences in nuance, give expression to the same centripetal forces in sociolinguistic and ideological life; they serve one and the same project of centralizing and unifying the European languages. (‘DN’, p. 271)

A unitary language is ‘a system of linguistic norms’ (‘DN’, p. 270) that incarnate centripetal forces:

these norms do not constitute an abstract imperative; they are rather the generative forces of linguistic life, forces that struggle to overcome the heteroglossia of language, forces that unite and centralize verbal-ideological thought, creating within a heteroglot national language the firm, stable linguistic nucleus of an officially recognized literary language, or else defending an already formed language from the pressure of growing heteroglossia. (‘DN’, pp. 270-271)

A unitary language, Bakhtin elaborates, is ‘language conceived as ideologically saturated, language as a world view, even a concrete opinion, insuring a *maximum* of mutual

Politics of Language and Culture in China Miéville’s novel *Embassytown*, in *Images of the Anthropocene in Speculative Fiction: Narrating the Future*, ed. by Tereza Dedinová, Weronika Łaszkiewicz and Sylwia Borowska-Szerszun (London: Lexington Books, 2021), pp. 191–211; Lynn Turner, ‘Secrets and Lies: *Embassytown*, Ethics and Eating in the Darkness’, *Foundation*, 52 (2023), 47–63; Can Koparan, ‘Subversion and the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis in Contemporary Science Fiction’, *Journal of Science Fiction and Philosophy*, 3 (2020), 1–19; Raphael Zähringer, China Miéville, *Embassytown* (2011), in *Handbook of the English Novel of the Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries*, ed. by Christoph Reinfandt (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2017), pp. 518–535.

⁷ Krystyna Pomorska, ‘Foreword’, in Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. by Helene Iswolsky (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1984), pp. vii–xii (p.viii)

⁸ M. M. Bakhtin, ‘Discourse in the Novel’, in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. by Michael Holquist, trans. by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1981), pp. 259–422 (p. 271). Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text.

understanding in all spheres of ideological life' ('DN', p. 271, emphasis in original). 'Heteroglossia' is Bakhtin's neologism for a phenomenon that coexists with, and is antithetical to, unitary language. To be more precise, heteroglossia calls forth verbal-ideological decentralisation and disunification within the parameters of language; it emblematises centrifugal forces:

At any given moment of its evolution, language is stratified not only into linguistic dialects in the strict sense of the word (according to formal linguistic markers, especially phonetic), but also—and for us this is the essential point—into languages that are socio-ideological: languages of social groups, 'professional' and 'generic' languages, languages of generations and so forth [...] [S]tratification and heteroglossia widen and deepen as long as language is alive and developing. ('DN', pp. 271–272)

Bakhtin maintains that '[e]very utterance participates in the "unitary language" (in its centripetal forces and tendencies) and at the same time partakes of social and historical heteroglossia (the centrifugal, stratifying forces)' ('DN', p. 272). He positions heteroglossia, furthermore, as a major component of the novel. 'The social and historical voices populating language, all its words and all its forms, which provide language with its particular concrete conceptualizations, are', Bakhtin writes, 'organized in the novel into a structured stylistic system that expresses the differentiated socio-ideological position of the author amid the heteroglossia of his epoch' ('DN', p. 300). The tension-fraught correspondence between unitary language and heteroglossia are ineluctable, protean determinants of the verbal-ideological realm.

The present chapter's mobilisation of heteroglossia as an instrument for analysing *Embassytown* is demarcated by a theoretical and practical limitation: it eschews an engagement with the novel–author that Bakhtin describes. This is because the chapter's aforestated telos—i.e., exemplifying the interplay between heteroglossia and Bakhtinian and ab- carnivalism in Miéville's novel—demands and, ultimately, need not transcend a narrative-centric approach to be successful. I am not here disavowing the merits of analysing *Embassytown* through the lens of a Bakhtinian novel–author relationship; indeed, there are doubtless fascinating insights susceptible to revelation by way of such an approach. It remains a promising investigative thread that future Miéville scholars may unpack.

2. Performative Mendacity

In *Embassytown*, Festivals of Lies operate as ‘extreme sport[s]’ (*E*, p. 98) on the Ariekei’s sequestered, Terre-colonised (that is, human-colonised) homeworld, Arieika. These verbal sports events constitute profound mediums for disruptions of Language via Bakhtinian and ab- modalities of carnivalistic heteroglossia that diverge from truth-claims.

During Festivals of Lies, Ariekei utilise carnivalistic heteroglossia of Bakhtinian ilk in attempts to utter falsehoods before an audience of their speciesmates and certain Terre. These Ariekei’s capacity to accomplish the nigh-impossible feat—to overcome their Language- and, hence, species-dictated reliance on truth-claims—hinges on them triumphantly exercising one of two disparate methods. Avice, the Terre narrator-protagonist of *Embassytown*, elucidates both:

One was to go slow. They [the festival-competing Ariekei] would try to conceive the untrue clause—near-impossible, their minds reacting allergically to such a counterfactual even unspoken, conceived without signification. Having prepared it mentally, however successfully or -un, they would pretend-forget it to themselves. Speak each of its constituent words at a certain speed, at a beat, separated, apart enough in the mind of a speaker that each was a distinct concept, utterable with and as its own meaning; but just sufficiently fast and rhythmic that to listeners, they accreted into a ponderous but comprehensible, and untrue, sentence. [...]

There was reputed to be another technique. It was the more base and vivid, and by far harder. This was for the speaker to collapse, in their mind, even individual word-meanings, and simply to brute-utter all necessary sounds. To force out a statement. This was quick-lying: the spitting out of a tumble of noises before the untruth of their totality stole a speaker’s ability to think them. (*E*, p. 149)

Slow- and quick-lying constitute Ariekei specimens of heteroglossia. That is, they decentralise and disunify the verbal-ideological makeup of Language by diverging from the truth-claims that therein function as the preponderant vehicle for centripetal forces—for verbal-ideological centralisation and unification—owing to the Ariekei’s reliance on them in everyday life. Terre and Ariekei authorities approbate these mendacity-shaped incarnations of heteroglossia, delimiting their utterance by the sports-festivals at issue. Thus, although they are taboo deeds, festival-bounded slow- and quick-lying are faux heteroglossic transgressions that do not resist authority: they belong to the domain of Bakhtinian carnivalism.

The avant-garde Ariekes known as Surl Tesh-echer originates and deploys a radical permutation of ab-carnivalistic heteroglossia to partake in Festivals of Lies. This ab-carnivalistic heteroglossia is divorced from the hackneyed slow and quick varieties, thus opposing-cum-destabilising the festivals' formative Bakhtinian carnivalism. 'It's not [i.e., Surl Tesh-echer is not] like most [festival] competitors, trying to force out a lie', observes the Terre linguist Scile. 'It's more systematic. It's *training* itself into untruth. It's using [...] weird constructions so it can say something true, then interrupt itself, to lie' (*E*, p. 163, emphasis in original). Scile appositely reads aloud a transcription of Surl Tesh-echer exercising this approach: " 'We didn't walk on our wings. We didn't walk. We didn't swallow earth. We didn't swallow.' " [...] " 'I'm not water. I'm not water. I'm water.' " (*E*, pp. 162–163). Surl Tesh-echer's progressive, word-eroding mendacity is a puissant expression of heteroglossia: in an unprecedented fashion, it decentralises and disunifies the verbal-ideological composition of Language that truth-claims strive to centralise and unify. Surl Tesh-echer is the sole Ariekes that uses this heteroglossic chicanery to compete in festivals: it manifests what I am calling 'private ab-carnivalism'.

At one festival, Surl Tesh-echer avails itself of this ab-carnivalism in striking fashion. '*Before the humans came*', the Ariekes declares, addressing the event's spectators (a gathering of its speciesmates, and a few privileged Terre), '*we didn't speak so much of certain things [...] Before the humans came we didn't speak so much. [...] Before the humans came, it said in ornery staccato, 'we didn't speak'* (*E*, pp. 148–149, emphasis in original). The concluding sentence-utterance marks the heteroglossic, anti-Bakhtinian untruth toward which Surl Tesh-echer's whittling down of qualifying clauses builds. It is private ab-carnivalistic heteroglossia since it disrupts the festival's constitutive Bakhtinian carnivalism absent license from Ariekene or Terre officials and, unlike typical Ariekene untruths, authentically contests the centripetal forces—i.e., the verbal-ideological centralisation and unification—embodied in Language truth-claims. This is validated by the 'radical and cussed' (*E*, p. 151) nature of Surl Tesh-echer's words. As Avice reflects, 'It [the Ariekes] hadn't whispered the second half of any truth; or trudged sound-by-metronome-sound through a constructed-unconstructed sentence. What $\frac{surl}{tesh-echer}$ had said was unquestionably a lie' (*E*, pp. 149–150). Surl Tesh-echer's heteroglossic falsehood demonstrates its engagement in private ab-carnivalism that

transcends officialdom-tolerated and, hence, untransgressive forms of Ariekeene deception—of Bakhtinian carnivalism—in an audacious, *sui generis* manner.

The most pronounced illustration of Surl Tesh-echer rupturing Bakhtinian carnivalism through its self-originated, heteroglossic falsehoods unfolds at the Licence Party.

An exposition of how Bakhtinian carnivalism informs the Licence Party provides a framework for grasping the peculiarly transgressive character of the ab-carnivalistic heteroglossia that Surl Tesh-echer deploys within its bounds. The Licence Party is hosted in Embassytown: a Terre colony situated in a prodigious Ariekeene city erected from a genus of quasi-living technology known as biorigging. A lone Pannegetch and cohorts of Ariekei, Kedis, Shur'asi, Terre (the Shur'asi are adolescent, as are some of the Terre) and automa (*E*, p. 178)) can freely interact in an Embassytown piazza despite imagined or formalised socio-hierarchical disparities. Here, as in mundane life, the Ariekei are pre-eminent: the indigenes, Avice remarks, 'graciously allowed [the first human colonists] to build Embassytown', and are 'gods compared to us, considering what was at their and our disposal' (*E*, p. 191). Since this intercommunal mixing stems from joint approbation by Terre and Ariekeene officials, the Licence Party is shaped by a Bakhtinian variant of carnivalistic familiarity. In essence, the affair's venue-piazza is a carnival square. The Licence Party's adjunct Festival of Lies entails Bakhtinian forms of carnivalistic eccentricity: Ariekeene festival-competitors utter falsehoods using 'verbal trickery like a whispered final clause'; hoping to 'excite Embassytowners [...] as if [they] were Host', Ambassador CharLott utter two 'feeble falsities'—that is, '[i]t's raining in here', '[i]t's raining liquor on us'; the Terre audience members pretend-forget that they can emulate CharLott's mendacity ('over the delighted noises of the Ariekei looking up to find the rain that wasn't there, came the shrieks of Terre [...] delight at each new untruth from the Ambassador. As if none of them could lie' (*E*, p. 179)). Such deeds equate to ab-carnivalistic eccentricities because they entail a government-sanctioned and ludic indulgence in performative, otherwise taboo falsehoods. The Festival of Lies in question, moreover, incorporates a specimen of Bakhtinian carnivalistic profanation, one that is emblematised by the theatrical overture to its prearranged falsehood-duel between Surl Tesh-echer and Ambassador LuCy. Indeed, this performance's faux belligerence—'Ambassador and Host squared', recalls Avice—is a 'blasphemy' (*E*, p. 180) authorised by Terre and Ariekeene

powers. Surl Tesh-echer disturbs the Bakhtinian carnivalism that has hitherto characterised the Licence Party by uttering its clause-eroding expression of ab-carnivalistic heteroglossia.

While the Terre MC cries out the rules of the falsehood-stand-off between itself and Ambassador LuCy, Surl Tesh-echer declares, '*Before the humans came we didn't speak so much of certain things*'; and when, in turn, the she-clones open their mouths to speak, it pre-empted them: '*Before the humans came*', it asserts, '*we didn't speak so much*' (*E*, p. 180, emphasis in original). Surl Tesh-echer's words qualify as heteroglossic according to the prevenient argumentation. Meanwhile, they are ab-carnivalistic because they preclude satisfaction of the MC's and LuCy's official duties, thereby undercutting not only their authority but also that of the Ambassadorial and Ariekene powers responsible for the Licence Party. Surl Tesh-echer, too, appears to avail itself of a palpable ab-carnivalistic eccentricity: following its second utterance, it 'shuck[s] its wings'—a gesture that the Terre audience (erroneously, perhaps) construes as 'bravado' (*E*, p. 180). The vivid, contentious untruth toward which the creature's two clause-reducing statements build ('*[b]efore the humans came we didn't speak*' (*E*, p. 181)) reaffirms its ab-carnivalism. Insofar as the Licence Party is an unprecedented affair, Surl Tesh-echer's engagement in private ab-carnivalistic heteroglossia accomplishes a history-making disruption of Ambassadorial and Ariekene governmental systems. Having exercised heteroglossia of the ab-carnivalistic sort, this Ariekes's falsehoods transcend the socio-historically inconsequential alternatives that Festivals of Lies demand owing to their formative Bakhtinian carnivalism.

The terminus of Surl Tesh-echer's private ab-carnivalism is fatal. The Ariekes is assassinated before the festival's audience by a Terre reactionist, in a 'careful juridical moment' (*E*, p. 184) secretly ordained by Ambassadors and Ariekene powers. The virtuoso lie-athlete is 'sentenced to Death by Human': it is 'murdered' and simultaneously 'executed, publicly, by its peers' because of its complicity in 'heresy' (*E*, p. 184): experimentation with utterances that meld lies and similes (the Ariekes render living and inanimate things palpable Language similes by having them perform or undergo certain acts, thus creating truths and enabling otherwise impossible comparative utterances).⁹

⁹ This is a radicalised heteroglossic act: it serves to express the verbal-ideological decentralisation and disunification of Language because it entails a marriage of two ordinarily discrete, incompatible language

While Surl Tesh-echer mobilises its self-originated brand of mendacity to exploit ab-carnivalistic heteroglossia's subversive potentialities within the bounds of festivals, Ambassador EzRa unwittingly become the catalyst for tainted heteroglossia that begets a Language crisis inflected by both Bakhtinian and ab-carnivalism.

3. Orateehood

EzRa's deviation from traditional Ambassadorhood is foundational to this crisis. Conventional Ambassadors entail a twosome of Terre clones, each of whom is bred in Arieka's Ambassador-farm and modified to augment certain psychological traits. In their totality, these artificially-bred *doppelgängers* are Embassytown's local rulers on Arieka under the aegis of their distant metropole, Bremen. Each Arieke possesses a dyad of inextricable voices, the Cut and the Turn: a biological quiddity that Ambassadors imitate to fulfil their titular duties on behalf of Bremen. Boasting a machine-augmented empathic unity that simulates a lone Arieke's mind, Ambassador-halves serve as either a faux Cut or Turn voice, which they exercise simultaneously to yield the Language-making, Ariekei-intelligible polyvocality. All Ambassador-halves bear a name that gestures toward their vocational interdependence: Mar and Sha are Ambassador MarSha, Dal and Ton are Ambassador DalTon, and so forth. Ambassadors are a privileged social group in that they alone can speak this unnatural Language, thus ensuring a Terre-delimited monopoly on communication with the Ariekei. Ambassador-spoken Language cannot but be a form of heteroglossia: its Cut- and Turn-speakers' duplication of an Arieke's polyvocality thwarts the verbal-ideological centralisation and homogeneity toward which the unitary language embodied in Ariekei-spoken Language strives. That is, the Language uttered by Ambassadors betokens the centrifugal forces of Language due to its artificiality—its origination from Terre—and diplomacy-centric functionality. Ez and Ra are Bremen agents who have been moulded into a neoteric breed of Ambassador. Both men are genetically distinct; nevertheless, their

categories—that is, lies and similes. Surl Tesh-echer is murdered-cum-executed on account of its heteroglossic experiments jeopardising the Language conservatism to which certain factions among the Ariekei and Ambassadors cleave. For Surl Tesh-echer's Arieke judge, lies are performances and similes are rhetoric, yet 'their synthesis, the first step in their becoming quite another trope, [is] sedition' (*E*, p. 184). To invoke Avic's summary of the affair, '[t]he [aforementioned] Ambassadors, as much as its [Surl Tesh-echer's] Arieke judge, saw in it an approaching danger. [...] Where there's commitment and dissent there might be change [...] There'd been a catastrophe on its way that, together, Ariekei and Terre had staved off' (*E*, p. 185).

psychological traits and rigorous training enable them to almost fully replicate the empathic unity of typical Ambassadors. Armed with the capacity to speak Language, Ez and Ra—the Cut- and Turn-speakers, respectively—are dispatched to Embassytown because Bremen’s officialdom seeks to frustrate the long-standing decolonisation efforts occurring therein.¹⁰ Ra’s loathing for Ez forecloses the unqualified empathic unity that Arieka’s local Ambassadors possess, rendering their Language a dysfunctional permutation of Ambassadorial heteroglossia. The Ariekei, in other words, perceive EzRa Language as an aural hallucinogen, an ‘indispensable brew of contradiction, insinuation and untethered meaning’ (*E*, p. 198). The indigenes find themselves relegated to addicts: oratees. This heteroglossic crisis for which EzRa are responsible proves to be inextricable from Bakhtinian carnivalism and ab-carnivalism in variegated ways.

Its genesis is the Bakhtinian carnivalism formative to the Arrival Ball: an Embassytown-hosted celebration of non-indigenous trade crews’ arrival to, and departure from, Arieka. The event’s attendees are multifarious: local commonfolk (physicians, artists, teachers); visitors who hail from elsewhere in the universe; Embassytown functionaries (Staff and Ambassadors, security officers); farmer-delegates from cloistered communities (*E*, pp. 1–2); Ariekei delegates—the only non-Terre attendees—of nebulous import (‘Some’, Avice recalls, ‘wore sashes indicating incomprehensible (to me) rank or predilections’ (*E*, p. 100)). These cohorts have gathered in Diplomacy Hall according to licence on the part of Embassytown Staff and Ambassadors, boasting equal opportunities to participate in the Arrival Ball and interact with one another despite their socio-hierarchical disparity. Stated otherwise, these ballgoers exhibit the Arrival Ball’s rootedness in a Bakhtinian variation of

¹⁰ EzRa’s stationing in Embassytown marks Bremen’s attempt to hamper the outpost’s pursuit of independence; as Avice explains,

EzRa[‘s] [...] success [as an Ambassador] would have changed everything. In two, three ship-shifts, the social system of this outpost would have been overthrown. If those other than our Ambassadors could speak Language, apparatchiks, career diplomats and loyalists could be sent to Embassytown for a few local years, and soon we’d rely on Bremen for survival.

Our Ambassadors would die slowly half by half, doppel by doppel, and be mourned but not replaced. The [Ambassador] crechè would close. The infirmary would empty as death took the failed, and there would be no others. (*E*, p. 271)

In short, Bremen positioned EzRa as a means of fracturing its ‘monopoly on Language’ (*E*, p. 271) via ‘an elegant imperial manoeuvre’, a ‘[c]ounter-revolution through language pedagogy and bureaucracy’ (*E*, p. 272).

carnivalistic familiarity. ‘Young men and women’, Avice recollects, ‘were dancing. They were licensed embarrassments to their bosses and elders, who would themselves, to their younger colleagues’ delight, sometimes sway or turn a humorously stilted pirouette’ (*E*, p. 2). Insofar as it ludically ruptures employment- and age-determined formalities, dancing constitutes a Bakhtinian genus carnivalistic eccentricity. Diplomacy Hall accommodates unions between antithetical things that are, to varying degrees, distanced from another: Terre and non-Terre; high and low demographics—i.e., Terre officials and Terre commoners, and of Terre *tout court* and Host delegates (these creatures, as noted earlier, are effectively gods); indigenes and foreigners. The Arrival Ball is thus predicated on a nexus of Bakhtinian carnivalistic *mésalliances*. Given the antecedent succession of phenomena, Diplomacy Hall is tantamount to a Bakhtinian genus of carnival square.

The inaugural Language that EzRa utter to the Arrival Ball’s attendant Ariekei marks the Bakhtinian strain of carnivalistic heteroglossia from which Ariekei’s oratee crisis springs. Foundational to this assertion is a conspiracy conjectured by the ex-Ambassador Bren conjectures—namely that Ariekei-born Ambassadors elected to sanction EzRa’s Language-greeting at the Arrival Ball in the hope that doing so would spawn one or two oratees, thus rendering EzRa an unusable Ambassador and subverting Bremen’s metropolitan power (*E*, pp. 197–198, emphasis in original). Bren’s conjecture is never validated or refuted. Nevertheless, there are two pieces of compelling evidence in favour of its validity: i) Embassytown’s Staff and native Ambassadors are committed to decolonisation and ii) Bren informs Avice ‘[t]hey’ve all been very concerned about who was calling what shots, what agendas were being forced, since they heard EzRa were coming’ (*E*, p. 198). The totality of Ambassadorial Language is heteroglossic: Cut- and Turn-speakers’ duplication of Ariekei’s polyvocality thwarts the verbal-ideological centralisation and unification toward which Ariekei-spoken Language (or unitary language) strives. That is, the Language uttered by Ambassadors betokens the centrifugal forces of Language due to its artificiality—its origination from Terre—and diplomacy-centric functionality. EzRa’s first enLanguageed words to the Ariekei at the Arrival Ball—‘ $\frac{su hail}{shurasuhail}$ ’/‘[g]ood greetings’ (*E*, p. 104)—is, given the foregoing details, a Bakhtinian permutation of carnivalistic heteroglossia because it is an approbated transgression, a subversion of the popular notion that only Terre clones can speak Language. EzRa and the Ariekei-indigenous Ambassadors who permit this Bakhtinian form of

carnivalistic heteroglossia unaware that it will reduce the listening Ariekei to oratees. The anti-Bremen Ambassadors-*doppelgänger*s find that their sanctioning of this heteroglossic greeting has not satisfied its goal of destabilising metropolitan authority. By virtue of calling forth an assemblage of oratees, it has transmogrified EzRa into a hallucinogen that is indispensable to the Ariekei and, hence, to Embassytown.

In the plaza adjacent to the Embassy—the Terre seat of government on Arieke—the representative of an oratee congregation delivers to EzRa an ultimatum, a form of ab-carnivalistic heteroglossia that unsettles time-hallowed Ariekei–Terre relations. ‘*EzRa will speak to us*’, declaims the representative, $\frac{kora}{shahundi}$, before a hundreds-strong audience of Embassytowners, ‘*or we will make it speak*’ (*E*, p. 156, emphasis in original). This ultimatum is a strain of ab-carnivalistic heteroglossia because its belligerent, orateehood-derived register evidences the centrifugal forces—the decentralisation and disunification—of Arieke verbal-ideological life while destabilising Ambassador authority by marking a rejection of diplomacy. “‘You can’t do this”, someone from Staff or Ambassadorial ranks shout[s], and someone else’, drawing attention to the emergent breakdown in interspecies protocol, ‘answer[s], “What *can* we do?”’ (*E*, p. 156, emphasis in original). In a bid to circumvent interspecies hostility, EzRa acquiesce to $\frac{kora}{shahundi}$ ’s ultimatum, giving rise to a tension-ridden dialogue between themselves and the oratee-representative:

Friends, they said. Ez said ‘curish’ and Ra ‘loah’—*friends*. There was a snap of Ariekei thoraxes and limbs.

Friends, we thank you for this visit, EzRa said, and the Ariekei reeled, buffeting me.

Friends, we thank you for this greeting, EzRa said, and the ecstasy went on.

Ra continued to mutter occasionally but Ez had gone silent, so Language decomposed. The Hosts hubbubbed. Some flailed their giftings and wrapped themselves within them, some entwined them with others’.

$\frac{kora}{shahundi}$ shouted *speak* and $\frac{ez}{ra}$ spoke again. They said pleasantries, emptinesses, polite variants of *Hello, hello*. (*E*, p. 156, emphasis in original)

The stiltedness of EzRa’s spoken Language—i.e., its eschewal of contractions, its deployment of the honorific ‘*[f]friend/s*’—signals their partaking in Ambassadorial heteroglossia, while the oratee-listeners’ ecstasy captures its hallucinogenic quality. $\frac{kora}{shahundi}$ ’s command that the two men ‘*speak*’ is an ab-carnivalistic mode of heteroglossia: it is an unorthodox register, an undiplomatic and imperious expression of addict-desire. For the

oratees, this sought-after development fruitfully assuages their lust for a dose of the Ambassador's heady Language while detrimentally perpetuating their addiction to it. Stated otherwise, its affordance of immediate sensuous gratification is negated by its guaranteeing of a long-term thralldom to EzRa's unwittingly deleterious heteroglossia. By way of rendering $\frac{kora}{shahundi}$ their conduit for ab-carnivalistic heteroglossia, the gathered Ariekei have disrupted traditional Ariekei–Terre politics by unveiling their orateehood.

A sudden corollary of $\frac{kora}{shahundi}$'s ab-carnivalistically heteroglossic demand, and of EzRa fulfilling it, is a peculiar carnivalistic ethos in Embassytown. '[P]eople ran through the streets of Embassytown', Avice recollects, 'in frightened carnival' (*E*, p. 196); soon thereafter, '[t]he streets [...] were something between carnival and apocalypse: moods of ending; hysteria; happiness, or its giddy approximation' (*E*, p. 199). Ab-carnivalistic heteroglossia, therefore, has ushered in a reconfiguration of both sociopolitical affairs on Ariekei and the affective states of Terre communities. This development proves to be momentous: it ultimately prefigures the forthcoming emergence of ab-carnivalism both within and without the human enclave.

Another contingent of Embassy-visiting oratees—a shade more formal than their predecessors—exercise ab-carnivalistic heteroglossia by demanding that their species' addiction to EzRa's Language henceforth be assuaged as necessary. '*We will hear EzRa speak*', the assembled oratees declare. '*This is how it will be. We will hear them speak. First now we will hear EzRa speak*' (*E*, p. 201, emphasis in original). These demands are specimens of ab-carnivalistic heteroglossia because i) their orateeship-fuelled expression in the unqualified future tense is 'rare in Language' (*E*, p. 201), capturing its speakers' manipulation of heteroglossia's decentralising and disunifying mechanisms *vis-à-vis* the verbal-ideological sphere; and ii) they weaken Ambassadors' authority on Ariekei by formally rejecting EzRa-based diplomacy to ensure their own race's self-gratification. As Avice recollects, 'the Hosts could only envisage that this was how it *would* be. They didn't allow discussion [...] They didn't present requests, or even demands, not really. They expressed need' (*E*, p. 201, emphasis in original). The Ariekei's demand-heteroglossia is momentous: it quasi-officially reconfigures established relations between themselves and the Terre. The initiation of this paradigm shift is reflected by EzRa's reluctant fulfilment of the oratees' need: 'They spoke

Language together, and brought the Hosts to rapture' (*E*, p. 201). The Ariekene demographic at issue is effectively relegated to EzRa's quasi-thralls. The affair's concomitant ab-carnivalistic crowning is registered by EzRa's ascendancy to a pre-eminent rank on Arieka, the title of which is originated by oratees: 'god-drug' (*E*, p. 225). The demand set forth by the oratees is a mode of heteroglossia by which the nascent Language crisis that sprang from EzRa's tainted Ambassadorial heteroglossia is exacerbated, and by which all remnants of traditional interspecies diplomacy are liquidated.

The oratees' ab-carnivalistically heteroglossic demand births a period in which EzRa, to protect Embassytown, must slake their Language addiction via heteroglossic speeches. EzRa's speeches are heteroglossic because they decentralise and disunify traditional Ambassadorial forms of diplomatic Language via two facets: i) they are 'like children's grammars'—i.e., logical or random 'subject-verb-object' compositions, such as '*I'm tired*'; and ii) their subjects are '[e]conomies and politics'—i.e., 'gifts for particular Ariekene listeners, in return for this or that favour' (*E*, p. 210, emphasis in original). Ez and Ra's speeches evolve into acts that collectively equate to the former man's 'autobiography' (*E*, p. 215). As with EzRa's other speeches, they are barterable, yet they reflect verbal-ideological decentralisation and disunification in Language since they are informal, 'rambling discussions of Ez's past', and since, in an absurd fashion, 'Ez [...] end[s] each of his sessions on a cliff-hanger, as if that [is] what ke[e]p[s] his [oratee] listeners avid' (*E*, p. 215). In their junkie daze, a cohort of Ariekei soon take to repeating Ez's autobiography:

... I always felt different from the others around me, the Ariekei listeners would repeat. We would walk past a patchwork of Ez's ego in scores of voices. She never understood me ..., ... so it was my turn ..., ... things would never be the same again.... [...] And that, I heard in an Ariekene voice, was where the trouble really started, and what happened next you'll have to wait to hear. (E, p. 215, emphasis in original)

The Ariekei have never before echoed a Terre's during or, ostensibly, before the events in *Embassytown*. Their words mark an odd and, given its rootedness in junkiehood, pernicious specimen of verbal-ideological centrifugalism within the bounds of Language. The creatures' mindless repetition of Ez's autobiography is a grievous symptom and reflection of the extent to which his and Ra's dysfunctional form of Ambassadorial heteroglossia traceable to empathic disunity has robbed the oratees' of their identity. EzRa's normalised barter-through-

speech has become a productive heteroglossic affair for Embassytown, in that it generates a modicum of economic and political stability. However, this inexorably comes at the cost of sharpening the Ariekei's emergent disempowerment due to its mind-addling satisfaction of their Language addiction. The oratees' simultaneously ab-carnivalistic and heteroglossic demand that EzRa satisfy their Language addiction as necessary has rendered novel forms of barterable and autobiographical heteroglossia pervasive, ambivalent elements of daily life on Arieika.

Amid the oratees' now-matured addiction to EzRa Language, a number of Embassytown's Terre residents espouse ab-carnivalistic eccentricity via belligerent self-governance. 'Micropolitics', Avice recalls, 'were everything in Embassytown by then, groups of men and women enforcing their wills in territories of two or three streets, armed with wrenches, or pistols or pistol-beasts crudely rigged, that they shouldn't have had to use' (*E*, p. 245). These phenomena are ab-carnivalistic eccentricities, for they are unauthorised by, and proclaim resistance to, the 'official group' (*E*, p. 297) that governs Embassytown: a meritocratic committee, a 'band of ersatz organisers' (*E*, p. 230) comprising 'no ones, floakers,¹¹ dissident Staff, a handful of precious Ambassadors' (*E*, p. 223). The ab-carnivalistic micropolitics embraced by Embassytown's Terre commonalty demonstrate that the crisis-freighted milieus spawned by the oratees' foregoing ab-carnivalistic heteroglossia are yoked to a repudiation of legitimate authority. Thus, Ariekei iterations of heteroglossia-founded transgression and crisis have proven themselves to be fertile ground for renegade latitude on the part of Terre commonfolk.

EzRa's unsought fracturing of established Ariekei–Terre rapport and concomitant ascension to Arieika's inaugural god-drug has been variously moulded by an interplay between heteroglossia and carnivalism of the Bakhtinian and ab- varieties.

When Ez spontaneously murders Ra during a quarrel, he divests himself and, above all, the oratees of an indispensable component for god-drug Language: a Turn-speaker. By order of Embassytown's ruling committee, Cal—one half of Ambassador CalVin, the second of whom has recently taken his own life—becomes Ez's replacement Turn-voice. With the

¹¹ Floakers are Terre who, like Avice, engage in 'the life-technique of aggregated skill, luck, laziness and chutzpah' (*E*, p. 18).

assistance of technological enhancements and hastily performed training, the disparate Ambassador-halves are transmuted into EzCal: ‘god-drug II’ (*E*, p. 291). Cal’s loathing of Ez imbues their Ambassadorial Language with an iteration of hallucinogenic there-not-there-ness more puissant than EzRa’s by far. Indeed, the newborn god-drug have at their disposal the unprecedented capacity to speak Language that coterminously satisfies oratees and compels their obedience.

Emerging in response to EzCal’s *de facto* godhood are a pair of revolutionary Arieke- languages predicated on signification achieved via ab-carnivalism.

4. God-Drug Redux: Revolutionary Semiosis

These distinct threads of indigenous ab-carnivalism are fundamentally opposed to the dictatorial realities of EzCal’s deific vein of Ambassadorial Language. EzCal’s god-drug Language is heteroglossic in form insofar as each of its constituent utterances arises from faux polyvocality on the part of Cut- and Turn-speakers. Nevertheless, it is not heteroglossic in effect: it does not centrifugalise—that is, does not serve to decentralise and disunify—the verbal-ideological realm of Language. As far as the oratees are concerned, EzCal Language is monoglossic in effect because it centralises and unifies the verbal-ideological domain of Language by invariably precluding denotative and interpretative possibilities: ‘EzCal couldn’t speak [Language] except as the god-drug, and the words they said [to the oratees] were always compulsions’ (*E*, p. 312), always ‘orders that could, literally, not be disobeyed’ (*E*, p. 389). The two men’s quasi-deific language subordinates Arieke- autonomy to their own will. By way of illustration, EzCal exercise their god-drug Language to elicit gestures of obedience from hundreds of fix-seeking oratees that have gathered in Embassytown to hear them speak. ‘*Raise your giftwings*, EzCal said, and the Ariekei did. *Shake them*, they said, and again, immediately, the Ariekei did’ (*E*, p. 295, emphasis in original). Likewise, the newfangled god-drug deploy their titillating heteroglossia to dictate socio-hierarchical relations in a township of the faction-riddled Arieke- city:

EzCal [...] announced that [the Arieke- known as] $\frac{kora}{saygiss}$ [...] was chief of this township. That this area was chosen from all the scattered remnant parts of the city, to be EzCal’s node, and that its regent there was $\frac{kora}{saygiss}$. [...] This wasn’t like a

momentary order to raise giftwings: it was a ruling, and when EzCal finished speaking, the Ariekei who had heard them remained ruled by $\frac{kora}{saygiss}$. The Ariekei were very quiet, and then did not complain.

For all I knew $\frac{kora}{saygiss}$ might already have been head of whatever clutch of streets it frequented. EzCal might have changed nothing—except that by saying it, they changed it. (*E*, p. 312)

Both EzCal's fanwing-related orders and their township-shaping ruling capture the monoglossic or centripetal function of their heteroglossic-in-form Language, as their outcomes are foregone conclusions: obedience from the oratees to which they speak. The jury-rigged Ambassador's pseudo-deific Language is a hallucinogenic medium for oppression, a centripetal force that grievously dictates both conceptual and material affairs. It annihilates its oratees-listeners' faculty for recognising the existence of heteroglossia in Language, concurrently ensuring and leveraging EzCal's *de facto* supremacy over them.

The first of the two ab-carnivalism-yoked languages that arise in response to the heteroglossic-cum-monoglossic Language employed by EzCal belongs to the Absurd. These Ariekei's connection with Language has been effaced—whether by their own hand or that of another—via mutilation: a wrenching-out of their auditory organs styled fanwings. Given their deafness, the Absurd have been divested of Language, of speech and truth: as Ambassador MagDa informs Avice, they are something akin to insane (*E*, p. 318). The Absurd's shrewd mobilisation of gesticulative ab-carnivalism inspires 'a semiotic revolution' (*E*, p. 344) steeped in an antipathy for Ariekei's past and present god-drugs. 'I'd seen them gesticulate', Avice recounts. 'Their commandos or commanders indicating with their giftwings [the Ariekei's nebulous arm-like appendages]. The Absurd had invented pointing. With the point they'd conceived a *that*. They'd given the jag of the body, the outthrust limb, power to refer' (*E*, p. 344, emphasis in original). These gestures are oriented toward extinguishing the authority that EzCal holds over the Absurd's hearing speciesmates via their heteroglossic-in form-yet-monoglossic-in-effect Language: they are coterminous ab-carnivalistic modes of eccentricity and profanation. In Language, Avice recollects, '[p]olysemy or ambiguity were impossible and with them most tropes that made other languages languages at all. But *thatness* faces every way: it's flexible because it's empty, a universal equivalent. *That* always means *and not that other*, too' (*E*, p. 344, emphasis in original). Avice's exposition of the Absurdian language's functionality in accordance with its

ascription of manifold possibilities to ‘that’-as-signifier illustrates ab-carnivalism’s production of a language far more fecund and versatile than its non-signifying precursor. Through ab-carnivalistic eccentricity, the Absurd tap gesticulation’s radical semiotic potentialities, diminishing the linguistic divide between themselves and the Terre who they disdain: ‘this new crude thing of flailing fingers and murderous stamping was closer by far to what we spoke, was at last cousin-tongue to those of sentients across the immer. [...] [T]he Absurd have learnt to speak like us’ (*E*, pp. 344–345). The Absurd’s gesticulatory ab-carnivalism is empowering insofar as it enables them to ‘ma[k]e community’ (*E*, p. 444) among themselves, thus reclaiming a measure of the sociability that their exposure to fanwing-mutilation all but annihilated. Moreover, it holds a bellicose utility: making possible the deafened Ariekei’s co-ordination of an EzCal-directed brand of ‘nihilist revenge’ and ‘revolutionary suicide’ (*E*, p. 320). Ab-carnivalism has emerged as a prerequisite for transcending an Ariekei reliance on Language to communicate, serving as an unexpectedly viable weapon against the heteroglossic-in-form-yet-monoglossic-in-effect Language uttered by EzCal.

Elsewhere, a quartet of dissident Ariekei for which Surl Tesh-echer was a companion-prophet—Avice nicknames them Spanish Dancer, Baptist, Duck, Toweller—initiate a different ab-carnivalistic mode of EzCal-oriented revolution. ‘*We want to decide*’, Spanish Dancer tells Avice, ‘*what to hear, how to live, what to say, what to speak, how to mean, what to obey. We want Language to put to our use*’ (*E*, p. 304, emphasis in original). Avice aids the Ariekei party with their endeavours to fulfil those desires: she renders similes, including that which she has canonically embodied in Language since her youth—‘*the girl who was hurt in darkness and ate what was given her*’ (*E*, p. 301, emphasis in original)¹²—the basis

¹² Occurring in a defunct, dilapidated Embassytown restaurant, the act by which Avice becomes a canonical simile is ill-defined:

What occurred in that crumbling once-dining room wasn’t by any means the worst thing I’d ever suffered, or the most painful, or the most disgusting. It was quite bearable. It was, however, the least comprehensible event that had or has ever happened to me. I was surprised how much that upset me.

For a long time the Hosts didn’t pay attention to me, but performed precise mimes. They raised their giftwings, they stepped forward and back. [...] They spoke. I understood only the very basics of what I heard, could pick out an occasional word. I listened for the overlapping whisper I’d been told meant *she*, and when I heard it I came forward and did what they wanted. (*E*, pp. 26–27, emphasis in original)

Having performed her part in this ritual, Ambassadors divulge to Avice the literal, ‘inadequate and misleading’ Terre translation of the simile that she personifies: ‘*There was a human girl who in pain ate what was given her*

for tutoring them in verbal metaphorisation. Doing so, she believes, is the optimal method for their access to untruths and, thus, a deliverance from EzCal's monoglossia-inflected iteration of heteroglossic Language.

Ab-carnivalistic heteroglossic is a *sine qua non* of Avice's pedagogy, which hinges on translations performed by the ex-Ambassador YISib—a fellow radical:

'Translate,' I said to YISib. 'You know me,' I said to the Ariekei. 'I'm the girl who ate, etcetera. I'm like you, and you're like me, and I'm like you. I *am* you.' [...]

'Tell them what I say,' I said. I looked at Spanish [Dancer]. I met its almost-eyes as urgently as if I were talking to a human. 'Tell it. I waited for things to be better, Spanish, so I'm like you. I am you. I took what was given to me, so I'm like the others. I am them.' I shone a torch on myself. 'I glow in the night, I'm like the moon. I am the moon.' I lay down. 'They know how we sleep, yeah? I'm so tired I lie as still as the dead, I'm like the dead. I'm so tired I *am* dead. See?'

[...] 'Tell it its name. Say: There were humans a long time ago who wore clothes that were black and red like your markings. Spanish Dancers'. I heard YISib neologise '*spanish dancer*.' 'I can't speak your name in Language, so I gave you a new one. Spanish Dancer. You're like, you *are* a Spanish Dancer.' (*E*, pp. 360–361, emphasis in original)

Avice's translated speech exemplifies ab-carnivalistic heteroglossia, for it extralegally undercuts EzCal's god-drug reign by decentralising and disunifying the verbal-ideological shape of Language via pedagogical similes and metaphors (i.e., via a deviation from the truth-claims that attempt verbal-ideological centralisation and unification in Language). Stated otherwise, this concurrently heteroglossic and ab-carnivalistic style of metaphor-tailored pedagogy marks a radical effort on Avice's part to destabilise the puissance of EzCal's heteroglossic-in-form-yet-monoglossic-in-function Language. Avice's physical gestures in the foregoing passage—shining a torch on herself and lying down on the earth—are formative to her lessons; they are ab-carnivalistic eccentricities. Avice has conjured a dissident symbiosis between heteroglossia, pedagogy and ab-carnivalism, expanding the

in an old room built for eating in which eating had not happened for a time' (*E*, p. 28, emphasis in original). This formulation is variously condensed with use. E.g., it becomes 'the girl who ate what was given to her' (*E*, pp. 134), 'the girl who ate was put in front of her', '*the girl who ate what she was given*' (*E*, p. 146, emphasis in original). Heteroglossic nuances are endogenous to such expressions. 'In the main', Avice demonstratively observes, 'my simile was used to describe a kind of making do. Spanish Dancer and its friends, though, by some odd rhetoric, by emphasis on a certain syllable, spoke me rather to imply potential change' (*E*, p. 134).

radical and ameliorative potentialities of each of them. She has endowed interspecies schooling with a crisis-addressing utility.

The ab-carnivalistic tutoring of which Avice avails herself bears fruit; it furnishes her Ariekei students with the power to signify via metaphor:

Spanish Dancer spoke slowly, as if it was listening hard to everything it said.

You are the girl who ate. I'm ^{spanish}/_{dancer}. I'm like you and I am you. Someone human gasped. Spanish craned its eye-coral and stared at its own fanwing. Two eyes came back to look at me. *I have markings. I'm a Spanish dancer.* I didn't take my eyes off it. *I'm like you, waiting for change. The Spanish dancer is the girl who was hurt in darkness.*

'Yes,' I whispered, and YISib said ' ^{shesh}/_{qus} ', 'Yes.

Other Ariekei were speaking. *We are the girl who was hurt.*

We were like the girl ...

We are the girl ...

'Tell them their names,' I said. 'You move like a Terre bird: you're Duck. You drip liquid from your Cut-mouth, so you're Baptist. Explain that, YISib, can you? Tell them, tell them the city's a heart ...'

I'm like the liquid-dripping man, I am him ...

With the boisterous astonishment of revelation they pressed the similes by which I'd named them on until they were lies, telling a truth they'd never been able to before. They spoke metaphors. (*E*, pp. 361–362, emphasis in original)

The metaphors uttered by Spanish Dancer's and its fellows are types of ab-carnivalistic heteroglossia owing to the same rationale that applies to Avice's metaphor-schooling. These Ariekei, in turn, render verbal signification a means of not only breaching the anti-signifying makeup of Language but also extirpating their dependence on EzCal's heteroglossic-in-form-yet-monoglossic-in-function Language. In a profoundly ameliorative fashion, the conjunction between ab-carnivalism and heteroglossia corrects their otherwise necessary subjection to EzCal's will. By means of its occurrence, the creatures have passed once more into a godless world, reclaiming the psycho-verbal autonomy of which EzRa and EzCal deprived them.

Spanish Dancer and its comrades-heretics derive from their newfound, ab-carnivalism-traceable capacity for signification an irrevocable psycho-linguistic reconfiguration. For them, Language, thought and word have abruptly ceased to be inextricable: where once there had been—and could only ever be—Language, there is now language *tout court*. As Avice recalls, there was '[s]omething in the [metaphorising Ariekei's] new language. New thinking.

They were signifying now—there, elision, slippage between word and referent, with which they could play. They had room to think new conceptions’ (*E*, p. 363). Avice, furthermore, divulges that they experience ‘[p]angs of something finishing, and of birth’, collectively emitting ‘the noise of old ways coming off in scabs’ (*E*, p. 365). Indeed, they find themselves ‘slough[ing] off lives’, and when they arrive at the terminus of this rebirth, they have entered ‘a new world (*E*, p. 366)—namely, the one inhabited by Terre. ‘[M]etaphorical language’, argues Paul Ricoeur, ‘is [intended] neither to improve communication nor to insure univocity in argumentation, but to shatter and to increase our sense of reality by shattering and increasing our language’.¹³ It is, Ricoeur deduces, a genus of ‘heuristic fiction’ by which ‘we experience the metamorphosis of both language and reality’.¹⁴ Ricoeur’s observations are the remedial corollary of the ab-carnivalistically heteroglossic metaphorisation that Spanish Dancer and its companions derive from Avice’s tuition. This metaphorisation-founded variant of ab-carnivalistic heteroglossia exercised by these Ariekei has enriched their lives by affording them access to signification that affords them otherwise impossible ways of kenning and speaking about the world. It has served as a fruitful doorway to intellectual and heteroglossic-cum-verbal fecundity. Above all, it has fulfilled their revolutionary agenda, as set forth by Spanish Dancer: ‘*to decide what to hear, how to live, what to say, what to speak, how to mean, what to obey*’.

Avice styles these post-Language beings the New Hearing, the New Ariekei, the New.

The New Ariekei’s subsequent parley with the Absurd legions that march on Embassytown is rooted in gesticulative and ideogrammatic ab-carnivalistic eccentricity that lays the foundation for a neoteric period of intercommunal amity on Ariekei. Indeed, both Ariekei communities partake in unauthorised ‘scratch-and-gesture conversations’ that yield an ‘ideogrammatic script’ (*E*, p. 385) for which the purpose, and of which the effect, is unification against EzCal’s authoritarian god-drug Language. This ideogrammatic language enables the Absurd to converse with the New Hearing, dissolving their nihilist woe and inducing them to forswear their war against the Terre. By virtue of calling forth a non-verbal

¹³ Paul Ricoeur, ‘Word, Polysemy, Metaphor: Creativity in Language’, trans. by David Pellauer, *Philosophy Today*, 17 (1973), 97-128 (repr. in *A Ricoeur Reader: Reflection and Imagination*, ed. by Mario J. Valdés (Toronto and Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1991), pp. 65–85 (p. 85).

¹⁴ Ricoeur, ‘Word, Polysemy, Metaphor: Creativity in Language’, p. 85.

genus of linguistic signification, ab-carnivalistic eccentricity has become an agent of anti-EzCal fellowship—of peacemaking. It is a phenomenon without which the impromptu New–Absurd parley would amount to naught; above all, it is a gateway to ameliorative psycholinguistic radicality.

Cal is assassinated during he and Ez’s grudging attendance at the parley. Scile perpetrates this killing on account of his fidelity to preserving Language: he refuses to allow the god-drug-halves to facilitate their acquiesced-to production of New Ariekei. In the post-EzCal epoch that dawns on Ariekei, Spanish Dance utilises a species of carnivalistic heteroglossia that frustrates definitive categorisation as Bakhtinian or ab-. To be more precise, Spanish Dancer exercises an amorphous brand of private carnivalistic heteroglossia, as manifested in post-Language metaphorisation, to deliver a speech to thousands of oratees in the Ariekei city. Its telos is to expunge their dependence on EzCal’s Language-as-dysfunctional heteroglossia by transfiguring them into fellow New Hearing.

From among the seven paragraphs that constitute Spanish Dancer’s address, two are sufficient to capture its manipulation of such amorphous carnivalistic heteroglossia:

Before the humans came we didn’t speak. We’ve been like countless things, we’ve been like all things, we’ve been like the animals over Embassytown [...] We didn’t speak, we were mute, we only dropped the stones we mentioned out of our mouths, opened our mouths and had the birds we described fly out, we were vectors, we were the birds eating in mindlessness, we were the girl in darkness [...]

You’ve never spoken before. You will. You’ll be able to say how the city is a pit and a hill and a standard and an animal that hunts and a vessel on the sea and the sea and how we are fish in it, not like the man who swims weekly with fish but the fish with which he swims, the water, the water, the pool. I love you, you light me, warm me, you are suns. (*E*, p. 394)

Spanish Dancer’s metaphorisation is a sample of heteroglossia because it renders signification a means of withstanding—of centrifugalising—the verbal-ideological centralisation and unification for which Language truth-claims strive. The carnivalistic amorphousness of this heteroglossic metaphorisation proceeds from Miéville-as-author’s omission of whether Spanish Dancer’s address to the oratees is sanctioned by, or in any capacity opposed to, Ariekei or Terre governments. Irrespective of whether it is a mode of carnivalistic heteroglossia that belongs to the Bakhtinian or ab- realm, Spanish Dancer’s

speech carries weight because it exploits heteroglossic metaphor's radical psycho-linguistic potentialities. To put it otherwise, this New Ariekees renders its amorphous, metaphor-inflected configuration of carnivalistic heteroglossia a vehicle for transfiguring the oratees' minds. Indeed, Spanish Dancer 'underst[ands] [...] the [Ariekene] psyches [that] it want[s] to alter, and its words [are] surgery' (*E*, p. 394). They operate as a method for rectifying a number of oratees' debilitating, hitherto-insurmountable addiction to EzCal's god-drug Language, imparting to them the heteroglossia-expanding and, thus, empowering faculty for signification. As Avice puts it, some oratees 'became new things, learnt language, at what Spanish Dancer said': the 'outlandish and impossible' character of its metaphorisation renders them the experients of a 'crisis' and 'ecstasy' by which their 'minds [are] reconfigured' (*E*, p. 395). Spanish Dancer's carnivalistic metaphorisation furnishes heteroglossia with the power to become a conduit for favourable psycho-linguistic metamorphoses.

'There is a unique way in which the maker and the appreciator of a metaphor are drawn closer to one another', observes Ted Cohen: '(1) the speaker issues a kind of concealed invitation; (2) the hearer expends a special effort to accept the invitation; and (3) this transaction constitutes the acknowledgment of a community'.¹⁵ Spanish Dancer's carnivalistic metaphorisation radicalises Cohen's tripartite paradigm. It is a concealed form of invitation to New Ariekeiship, creating fragments of an unprecedented community, rather than merely acknowledging one. '[T]he wise thing', Mark Twain asserts, 'is for us diligently to train ourselves to lie thoughtfully, judiciously; to lie with a good object, and not an evil one; to lie for others' advantage, and not our own; to lie healingly, charitably'.¹⁶ Spanish Dancer has done so via its metaphor-steeped address. As when Deeba and Tanner exercise *parrhesia* in *Un Lun Dun* and *The Scar*, respectively, Spanish Dancer taps the individual voice's potentiality to emancipate communities from baleful, authority-born conditions (in this case, EzRa and EzCal Language).

The prevenient succession of ab-carnivalistic transgressions on the part of Absurd and New Hearing circles engenders and prepares the way for lasting changes on Arieika. Among

¹⁵ Ted Cohen, 'Metaphor and the Cultivation of Intimacy', *Critical Inquiry*, 5 (1978), 3–12 (p. 8).

¹⁶ Mark Twain, *On the Decay of the Art of Lying* ([Auckland(?)]: The Floating Press, 2008), p. 11, emphasis in original.

them is the Arieke city's partitioning into two distinct-yet-interconnected cities. Having forged a cognitive affinity between their demographics, the Absurd and the New coexist in one of those cities; the totality of remaining oratees dwell in the second (*E*, p. 401). Now, from the moment that consciousness stirs within them, young New Ariekei are taught to suppress their instincts, experiencing a handful of days during which, as in the pre-EzRa age, word and referent are indivisible, and untruths are preternatural. Despite thereafter learning that the city in which they live was once far different, these New Ariekei younglings cannot envisage it (*E*, p. 401). Some Ariekei deafen themselves, for they now grasp that doing so will remedy their addiction to EzCal Language without extirpating their mind and capacity for speech. Others, Avice divulges, furnish themselves with plentiful audio recordings of EzCal Language; they will found pastoral autarchies, will rear Language-speaking progenies for which, to circumvent addiction, both the Arieke city and Terre will be 'taboo' (*E*, p. 401). Future ambassadors are to be New Ariekei (*E*, p. 401). While Language precluded the Old Ariekei from apprehending that the verbal sounds made by Terre constituted words, its signification-allowing successor effaces such barriers. By way of illustration, Spanish Dancer learns to avail itself of French: '*je.voudrais.venir.avec.vous*', it aptly remarks to Avice—that is, '*I.Would.Like.To.Come.With.You*' (*E*, p. 402, emphasis in original). The New Hearing, too, speak a novel language that dissolves the communicative chasm between their former, non-signifying selves and the Terre: 'Anglo-Ariekei' (*E*, p. 403). In short, the ab-carnivalism by which the Absurd and Spanish Dancer and its comrade-revolutionaries unfetter themselves from Language's referential constraints via their procurement of the ability to signify brings forth an amplified version of Anna Trosborg's recognition that '[c]ulture and language are intertwined and shape each other'.¹⁷

The Absurd legions and the untruth-fixated party of which Spanish Dancer is a member have laid bare ab-carnivalism's amenability to informing successful psycho-linguistic revolutions. This Bakhtinian-Miévillean affair has proven to be an indispensable determinant of reconciling the Absurd's wordless, gesticulative revolution with that contrarily spoken, metaphor-based revolution effected by Spanish Dancer and its comrades. The heteroglossic crisis that proceeded from Bakhtinian carnivalism at the Arrival Ball (i.e., from Ambassadors'

¹⁷ Anna Trosborg, 'Introduction', in *Pragmatics Across Languages and Cultures*, ed. by Anna Trosborg, *Handbooks of Pragmatics*,7 (Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton, 2010), pp. 1–39 (p. 2).

attempts to destabilise Bremen's control over Embassytown) has been resolved by the ab-carnivalistic heteroglossia that Spanish Dancer and its circle employ. For both the indigenes and Terre on Arieka, the interplay between these two genera of ab-carnivalism has proven to be a major determinant of remaking everyday life.

5. A Linguistic Tapestry

The interplay between heteroglossia, Bakhtinian carnivalism and ab-carnivalism is a core determinant of the means by which Miéville limns sociohistorical change in *Embassytown*.

Surl Tesh-echer's ab-carnivalistic vein of heteroglossic mendacity is an idiosyncratic phenomenon in *Embassytown*: it instantiates how the Bakhtinian carnivalism that attends Festivals of Lies is amenable to destabilisation by way of an individual voice. Indeed, Surl Tesh-echer's signature falsehood ('[b]efore the humans came we didn't speak') imparts to Festivals of Lies an ab-carnivalistic disposition by which it i) flouts the official and, hence, pseudo-transgressive modes of taboo discourse embodied in slow- and quick-lying; and ii) radically circumvents adherence to the truth-claims that structure Language.

At the Arrival Ball, EzRa's greeting of the Ariekei is a Bakhtinian form of carnivalistic heteroglossia that initiates the novel's principal plot: an unforeseen Language crisis. The Embassy-visiting contingent of oratees whose demands subjugate EzRa to their will elucidate how heteroglossia's inflection by ab-carnivalism enables it to operate as an instrument for recasting established interspecies relations. Since the oratees' ab-carnivalistically heteroglossic demand inspires EzRa's deployment of barterable speeches, it begets a form of heteroglossic speech indispensable to everyday life. Here, then, is a reflection of how unprecedented ab-carnivalistic veins of heteroglossic utterance may directly contribute to the emergence of other, non-carnivalistic sorts.

The 'amorphous carnivalism' that thus consumes Embassytown, along with the ab-carnivalistic eccentricity exercised by the pockets of Terre who espouse dissident micropolitics, demonstrate ab-carnivalistic heteroglossia's susceptibility to exerting sociocultural weight by functioning as a conduit for anomie.

Ab-carnivalism is inextricable from the revolutionary facets of *Embassytown*. The Absurd's gesticulatory language manifests an interrelation between wordless signification via ab-carnivalistic eccentricity and profanation, and a communal struggle against EzCal's heteroglossic-cum-monoglossic brand of god-drug Language. The circle of lie-obsessed Ariekei bent on reconfiguring Language via metaphorisation—Spanish Dancer, Baptist, Duck and Toweller—impart visibility to the radical merits of a correspondence between the unappropriated, anti-authority spirit of ab-carnivalism and the typically latent verbal-ideological powers endogenous to heteroglossia. Avice's engagement in pedagogical heteroglossia of the ab-carnivalistic variety is foundational to their metaphorisation, thus marking a fruitful interspecies collaboration. Spanish Dancer and its fellow radicals' utterance of metaphors is the most profound specimen of ab-carnivalistic heteroglossia in *Embassytown*, for it remakes their genetic psycho-verbal quiddities (i.e., it replaces Language with language). Spanish Dancer's metaphor-laden address to thousands oratees is an amorphous mode of carnivalistic heteroglossia, boasting peculiar radicality in Miéville's novel insofar as an individual Ariekei here engenders communal amelioration by neutering EzCal's heteroglossic-in form-yet-monoglossic-in-effect Language. The lasting changes that spring from the triumphant Absurd-New parley instantiate Miéville's attribution of planet-shaping potentialities to ab-carnivalistic heteroglossia.

The Language crisis on Arieika stems from the Bakhtinian modality of carnivalistic heteroglossia invoked by EzRa at the Arrival Ball, and it is chiefly resolved due to the ab-carnivalistic, metaphor-based alternatives uttered by Avice and Spanish Dancer's cohort. The interplay between heteroglossia, Bakhtinian carnivalism and ab-carnivalism thus constitutes a pivotal dynamic of the overarching plot that Miéville weaves in *Embassytown*.

Chapter Four: Xenosomatic Degradation

The *Oxford English Dictionary* holds two definitions of ‘teratology’—namely, i) ‘[a] discourse or narrative concerning prodigies; a marvellous tale, or collection of such tales; and ii) ‘[t]he study of monstrosities or abnormal formations in animals or plants’.¹ Miéville has appositely said in interviews that he possesses ‘a love of teratology’,² explaining that ‘as a writer [,] there is a joy in the making of the impossible. There is something about the carnivalesque creativity of monsters’.³ Regardless of whether they qualify as monsters, a number of Miéville’s fictional xenosomas—humanoid and inhuman bodies—evoke carnival since they exercise xenosomatic degradation: acts of carnivalistic destruction–regeneration that affect the sensuous world, the abstract world or both. On some occasions, human bodies are transmogrified into xenosomas by way of their exposure to such acts. In Miéville’s fiction, this chapter argues, xenosomatic degradation’s carnivalistic ambivalence enables it to variously alter the lives and/or worlds that its performers inhabit. In doing so, it reflects the pervasive, reality-altering possibilities that carnivalistic ambivalence can incite in Miéville’s fiction despite its isolation from the communal spatiotemporal transgression of both Bakhtinian carnivalism and ab-carnivalism.

1. The Depths of the Stomach

Ingestion is among the most elementary mediums for the enactment of xenosomatic degradation within the bounds of Miéville’s fictional universe. Fabio Parasecoli shrewdly maintains that ‘food is not only a crucial locus for the construction of cultural identities of

¹ ‘Teratology, *N.*’, in *Oxford English Dictionary* < <https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/3865629188> > [accessed 10 October 2025].

² Jeff VanderMeer, ‘China Miéville and Monsters: “Unsatisfy Me, Frustrate Me, I Beg You”’, *Weird Fiction Review* < [China Miéville and Monsters: "Unsatisfy me, frustrate me, I beg you." | Weird Fiction Review](#) > [accessed 10 October 2025]. The text in which this quotation appears is derived from an interview that VanderMeer conducted with Miéville in 2008.

³ Brown, ‘Socialist Irrealism’. In an interview with Lou Anders, Miéville pertinently remarks, ‘I’m in this fucking business for the monsters. The monsters are the main thing that I love about the fantastic. And unfortunately, you can’t really sell books of monsters to publishers. They insist on stories linking them’ (Lou Anders, ‘An Interview with China Miéville’, *The Believer*, 23 (2005) <<https://www.thebeliever.net/an-interview-with-china-mievill/>> [accessed 5 October 2025]).

individuals and communities but also an arena in which social structures, ideological systems, and power relations are constantly negotiated'.⁴ Parasecoli's words hold true for the ingestive variants of xenosomatic degradation implemented by heterogeneous characters in Miéville's oeuvre: the malevolent sack-phantasm in the short story 'Säcken'; Saul Garamond—the half-human-and-half-rat protagonist of *King Rat*; and the cohort of mosquito-women that feature in *The Scar*. Each of these carnivalistic phenomena is marked by certain nuances with regard to their method, outcome/s and implication/s, all of which determine their productivity.

The peculiarly hessian-shaped apparition in 'Säcken' is traceable to the *poena cullei*: a grievous method of capital punishment reserved for those judged guilty of parricide. The *poena cullei* demanded that said offender be immured in a sewn-together sack along with an ape, a cock, a viper and a dog, and that the sack then be cast into a river or sea.⁵ Thus, as the submerged malefactor's quietus drew near, they could take no pleasure in the elements: they were refused air while living, and a grave when dead ('S', p. 160).⁶ The sack-apparition at the heart of Miéville's short story holds the restless spirit of an eighteenth-century Saxon who suffered that fate—a mother who committed infanticide.

A vivid specimen of the eldritch thing invoking xenosomatic degradation materialises when the protagonist of Miéville's short story, Mel, endeavours to mollify it via a cat-sacrifice.⁷ Doing so, Mel hopes, will end the Säcken-bearing nightmares with which she has been afflicted of late: a product of it seeking to make her part of its interspecies contents. Mel deposits an abducted, sack-immured cat into the water below which the Säcken lurks: 'the lake swallow[s] the bag and the cat's noise end[s]' ('S', p. 168, emphasis in original). Stated

⁴ Fabio Parasecoli, 'Eating Power: Food, Culture, and Politics', in *Discourse, Culture and Organization: Inquiries into Relational Structures of Power*, ed. by Tomas Marttila (Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), pp. 129–153 (p. 130), doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-94123-3. In a similar fashion, Lorna Piatti-Farnell astutely observes that '[e]ating transforms our bodies, but it also affects our identities: for what we eat, and how we eat it, is [...] complicated by layers of psychological and cultural relevance' (Lorna Piatti-Farnell, *Consuming Gothic: Food and Horror in Film* (Auckland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), p. 4).

⁵ China Miéville, 'Säcken', in *Three Moments of an Explosion: Stories* (London: Macmillan, 2015), pp. 142–172 (p. 160). Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text.

⁶ Among the most insightful disquisitions on the *poena cullei* are Max Radin, 'The Lex Pompeia and the Poena Cullei', *Journal of Roman Studies*, 10 (1920), 119–130; and Florike Egmond, 'The Cock, the Dog, the Serpent, and the Monkey. Reception and Transmission of a Roman Punishment, or Historiography as History', *International Journal of the Classical Tradition*, 2 (1995), 159–192.

⁷ At this juncture in the tale, the execution sack has recently claimed the life of Mel's lover, Joanna, by assimilating her: the boat on which she and Mel leisurely traversed the lake is one day found adrift with one of its oars missing, and with one of her puddle-immersed slippers inside. Joanna's remains never surface.

otherwise, the human-cum-animalistic genus of hessian phantasm ingests the sacrificial feline, therefore manifesting xenosomatic degradation's destructive quiddity. Mel's effort to appease the Säcken come to naught: several months after it assimilated the animal sacrifice, the entity subjects her to a fatal nightmare in her London apartment. '[T]he specter', according to Jacques Derrida, 'is a paradoxical incorporation, the becoming-body, a certain phenomenal and carnal form of the spirit. It becomes [...] neither soul nor body, and both one and the other'.⁸ The somatic interstitiality that Derrida ascribes to spectres finds expression in the regenerative aspect of the xenosomatic degradation that Miéville's sack-phantasm experiences: 'It's so much bigger than it was. She fed it and it's bloated' ('S', p. 171). The Säcken's enlargement captures xenosomatic degradation's faculty to yield beneficial and, above all, enduring ab-corporeal change at the expense of a contrarily material entity. It has registered the inexplicable fact that, despite its spectrality, the sack-thing, as with a menagerie of flesh-and-blood alternatives, is affected by the principle of unfinishedness.

The juridical sack-phantom's ingestion of Mel signals xenosomatic degradation's establishment of a correlation between carnivalistic ambivalence and metaphor. The destructive quiddity of this xenosomatic degradation, of course, is bespoke by its ushering in of Mel's demise, while its regenerative corollary finds expression in the enlargement of its ab-physical xenosoma—a deducible, rather than explicitly depicted, outcome (the cat has instantiated the relation between its ingestion and growth). Esther Peeren notes that 'the ghostly metaphor's continuing liveliness – its apposite proclivity to *keep coming back to life* – is ensured by its invocation of a vast realm of sometimes contradictory associations'.⁹ In an interview with Cynthia Dewi Oka, Miéville similarly declares that '[a]esthetic categories, including the weird and the spectral, have always been deeply polysemic. You can make ghosts do lots and lots of contradictory things, even, sometimes, at the same time'.¹⁰ Miéville's sack-phantasm metaphorises the notion that bygone variations of approbated torture and murder on behalf of justice conjure ghosts that intrude on the modern zeitgeist. Miéville-as-author provides an appositely metaphor-freighted description of the Säcken

⁸ Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, trans. by Peggy Kamuf (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge Classics, 2006), p. 5.

⁹ Esther Peeren, *The Spectral Metaphor: Living Ghosts and the Agency of Invisibility* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), p. 6, emphasis in original.

¹⁰ Cynthia Dewi Oka, 'Spectres and Ruptures on the Path to Liberation: An Interview with China Miéville', *Adi*, February 2024 <<https://adimagazine.com/articles/spectres-and-ruptures-on-the-path-to-liberation-an-interview-with-china-mieville/>> [accessed 12 October 2025].

moments before it devours Mel: ‘like the stomach it is, it will have her, and everything. Its sutures unravel. The seams are law’s mouths. [...] The Säcken opens to feed, to make her poena’ (‘S’, p. 171). This there-but-not-there apparition’s ingestive xenosomatic degradation ab-reifies the contradictory nature of spectres, as set forth by Preen and, above all, Miéville. The sack-eidolon thus circumvents reducibility to a disembodied juridical metaphor: its feasting on the cat and Mel intervene in and effectively critique modernity. The carnivalistic spirit of its ingestive praxis has rendered its historicity inescapable.

In *King Rat*, Saul exercises an ingestive variant of xenosomatic degradation that, unlike the malevolent sack-spectre derived from jurisprudence, is utterly tangible. The inaugural apparition of Saul therein rendering food the object of xenosomatic degradation is also the most pronounced, transpiring after he discovers that his genetic hybridity furnishes him with abnormal digestive capabilities (‘*You’ve got rat blood in your veins*’, he is told by his father, King Rat. ‘*There’s nothing you can’t stomach*’).¹¹ Such xenosomatic degradation is founded on Saul’s breach of gastronomic mores by ingesting a putrefied burger that he has scavenged from a heap of alleyway detritus. ‘He took a bite. He wriggled his tongue into the meat, pushed apart the fibres. He probed, tasting the dirt and decay. Lumps of gristle and fat split open in his mouth. [...] Saul swallowed and did not feel ill’ (*KR*, p. 48). These acts, and the attendant digestive process—‘the acids of his stomach [are] getting to work inside him, breaking down the old food’ (*KR*, p. 49)—register xenosomatic degradation’s destructive component: they disrupt the burger’s form and palpability. The regenerative facet of xenosomatic degradation finds expression in the alien, transfigurative species of invigoration that Saul experiences: ‘He drew his strength from the old cold meat [...] His world changed [...] He felt molecules scurrying out of his gut, carrying strange energy [...] He was changing from the inside out’ (*KR*, p. 49). Saul’s xenosomatic degradation—its carnivalistic lifeblood, its destruction–regeneration function—modifies the pernicious, orthodox corollaries of ingesting dirt and decay. It strips them of their objectionable nature by virtue of affording them a preternatural fruitfulness: the capacity to enhance physical wellbeing rather than compromise it.

¹¹ China Miéville, *King Rat* (London: Macmillan, 1998), p. 46, emphasis in original. Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text.

The regenerative power of Saul's xenosomatic degradation extends to his vision. Michael Thompson's formulation of 'rubbish theory' elucidates this development's ideological underpinning. 'The survival of a world view', Thompson asserts, 'can be ensured only by eliminating, rejecting, or ignoring [...] intrusive and dangerous elements that preclude the continued coexistence of differing world views. These elements that elicit such responses constitute the cultural category "rubbish"'.¹² Saul's partaking of the decay-riddled burger signals the baleful outcome *vis-à-vis* a worldview if invasive and perilous elements are not eliminated, rejected or ignored. Stated otherwise, the rat-man's inculcated, hygienic worldview is annihilated because he ignores the scavenged fare's intrusive and dangerous rottenness—'don't touch,' he thinks, 'it's dirty, take it out of your mouth' (*KR*, p. 48, emphasis in original)—and consumes it. Springing from this affair is the alluded-to ocular regeneration:

now dirt was inside him. As he drew sustenance from it, it coloured what he could see, but he looked around at his newly tarnished world as if it were a cynosure. It held no horror for him.

Purity is a negative state and contrary to nature, Saul had once read. That made sense to him now. He could see the world clearly in all its natural and supernatural impurity, for the first time in his life. (*KR*, p. 78, emphasis in original)

Xenosomatic degradation has transmuted the ingestion of dirt into an instrument for purifying Saul's vision, thus rupturing accepted dirty–clean and internal–external binaries. It affords the man-ratling an advantage over humans by rectifying his otherwise insurmountable ignorance of the world's 'natural and supernatural impurity'.

Mary Douglas's ruminations about the sociocultural import of dirt, or 'matter out of place',¹³ in *Purity and Danger* (1996) offer a means of more firmly apprehending the interplay between category-rupturing and the puissance of Saul's newfound murine sight:

rejected bits and pieces [dirt] [...] are recognisably out of place, a threat to good order, and so are regarded as objectionable and vigorously brushed away. [...] [T]hey have some identity: they can be seen to be unwanted bits of whatever it was they came from, hair or food or wrappings. This is the stage at which they are dangerous; their half

¹² Michael Thompson, *Rubbish Theory: The Creation and Destruction of Value*, 2nd edn (London: Pluto Press, 2017), p. 100.

¹³ Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Routledge Classics, 2002), p. 44

identity still clings to them and the clarity of the scene in which they obtrude is impaired by their presence. [...]

The danger which is [here] risked by boundary transgression is power. Those vulnerable margins and those attacking forces which threaten to destroy good order represent the powers inhering in the cosmos. Ritual which can harness these for good is harnessing power indeed.¹⁴

Saul exemplifies Douglas's notion insofar as he harnesses those exposed margins and assailing forces embodied in dirt—i.e., its partial identity, its presence on the threshold between that which does and does not have definitional certitude—by ingesting it, by rendering it a gateway to reconfigured, extrahuman sight. Xenosomatic degradation has allowed Saul to transfigure the nebulosity of dirt (its fundamental subversion of 'good order') into a beneficial fact.

Furthermore, the xenosomatic degradation by which Saul metabolises the reclaimed burger yields his capacity for hitherto-impossible feats of rat-like traversal. He presses his body, for instance, into a right-angle of concrete, and 'feeling his flesh mould itself into the space', exercises his new, 'prodigious strength' to scale most of a wall ('*Like a rat*, he thought, *squeeze and move and pull like a rat*' (KR, p. 79, emphasis in original)). King Rat's response to this wall-scaling evinces its indivisibility from xenosomatic degradation: 'Isn't it a marvel what you can do', he says, 'with a scrap of decent grub [the scavenged burger, among other fare of that variety] in your belly?' (KR, p. 79). Saul's traversal of London by such methods divorced from the laws of physics notably intersects with a socio-ideological conflict that he explicitly acknowledges weeks later:

He realized that he had defeated the city. He crouched on the roof (of what building he did not know) and looked out over London at an angle from which the city was never meant to be seen. He had defeated the conspiracy of architecture, the tyranny by which the buildings that women and men had built had taken control of them, circumscribed their relations, confined their movements. These monolithic products of human hands had turned on their creators, and defeated them with common sense, quietly installed themselves as rulers. They were as insubordinate as Frankenstein's monster, but they had waged a more subtle campaign, a war of position more effective by far. (KR, p. 228)

¹⁴ Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, pp. 197–199.

Saul's victory over 'the conspiracy of architecture' evokes the analytical focal point of Miéville's critical essay that bears the same title: the '*animate, alien* building'.¹⁵ Miéville therein argues that buildings of this genus are 'projected as *active* and even *conscious agents*, able to intervene in the world. They are seen as alien in that their agendas, their motivations, are utterly *non-human*'.¹⁶ The angle from which Saul surveys London transcends the limitations that, to him, its animate, alien buildings seek to foist on his palpable and social mobility. Indeed, as Saul 'look[s] out over London at an angle from which the city [is] never meant to be seen', he beholds that which it wishes to deny him: an untrammelled perspective of the social relations inscribed in its brick-and-stone anatomy—that is, the tacit-yet-puissant assertions of will by which it dictates the lives of its makers and their progeny. Insofar as Saul's burger-founded xenosomatic degradation unlocks his preternatural, rat-like locomotion it is a prerequisite for this hitherto-impossible critique by which he comes to better apprehend mankind's place amid London's brick-and-stone anatomy. In the absence of xenosomatic degradation, London's conspiratorial architecture would remain undefeated, its tacit rule over its flesh-and-blood subjects unbroken.

The Scar holds a species of ingestive xenosomatic degradation far removed from that of the Säcken and Saul exercise, respectively, for it is founded on communal haematophagy.

This xenosomatic degradation is enacted by a cohort of she-anophelii—mosquito-women—when they imbibe sows' blood via the twelve-inch proboscises that spring from their mouths. The she-anophelius who slakes her thirst as a horrified Bellis Coldwine looks on from afar conjures the pre-eminent specimen of the xenosomatic degradation in question:

Bellis watches in disbelief, but it is not her imagination – the pig is *shrinking*. Its legs kick with spastic terror, and then with the judder of dying nerves as its extremities are drained. Its fat shanks are compressing as its innards shrivel, drying. Its skin is well creased now, in tides and ridges all over its diminishing body. The colour is leaving it. And as the blood and health disappear from the sow, they enter the mosquito-woman.

Her belly swells. She attached herself to the pig a husk, gaunt and malnourished. As the pig lessens, she grows, becoming fatter at an astonishing rate, colour flooding her from her distending stomach outwards. She moves oily on the animal, growing sluggish and replete.

¹⁵ China Miéville, 'The Conspiracy of Architecture: Notes on a Modern Anxiety', *Historical Materialism*, 2 (1998), 1–32 (p. 1, emphasis in original).

¹⁶ Miéville, 'The Conspiracy of Architecture', p. 1, emphasis in original.

Bellis watches with sick fascination as the pints of pig blood pass fast through that bony fletch, rushing from one body into another.

The pig is dead now, its rucked skin sinking into new valleys between its drained muscles and its bones. The anophelius is fat and pinking. Her arms and legs have nearly doubled in girth, and the skin is now stretched around them. The swelling is mostly concentrated on her bosoms and belly and arse, which are obese now, but not like human fat. They look tumorous: taut, gore-swelled and pendulous growths.

[...]

[...] She withdraws, leaving the pig a sack of tubes and bone. (*S*, pp. 372–373, emphasis in original)

Xenosomatic degradation's destructive character is here exhibited by the swine's loss of blood and health, by its shrinking body, shrivelling innards and, above all, its transmogrification into naught but a lifeless flesh-sack of tubes and bones. The mosquito-woman's concomitant, prompt transition from 'a husk, gaunt and malnourished', into a 'fat and pinking' thing with quasi-tumorous body fragments exemplifies xenosomatic degradation's regenerative function. Her fellows, of whom there are approximately a dozen, end their own malnutrition by performing equivalent xenosomatic degradation: 'Some [sows] are adorned with one woman, some with two. All are shrivelling, as if sun-dried and desiccated, and all the anophelii are growing gross and tight with blood' (*S*, p. 373). Xenosomatic degradation informs the she-haematophages' indulgence in a feast that suspends their polyphagia and conjures a revitalisation of their withered flesh. Given that it serves as a medium for communal amelioration, this ingestive vein of xenosomatic degradation boasts a hyper-carnivalistic utility. It accomplishes something of which its aforesaid Säcken- and Saul-implemented analogues have/could not due to their circumscription by individual experiences. The rehabilitated circle of vampiric women-things have actualised the communal potentialities endogenous to xenosomatic degradation of the ingestive variety.

An unspecified-but-assured result of the she-anophelii exercising xenosomatic degradation is that some of them gain a faculty of which they are usually bereft: consciousness. In a conversation with Uther Doul, Bellis offers a pertinent exposition of the association between the mosquito-women's blood-imbibition and their access to consciousness:

They can spend a year without feeding, screaming ravenous for all those weeks: it's all they can think about. But when they've fed, when they're full – really sated – there's a day or two, maybe a week, when the hunger abates. [...]

[...] Once in a while they can stop themselves, when their bellies are full and their minds clear for a few days or hours, and they know what it is they do, how they live. They're as intelligent as you or me, but they grow up too distracted by starvation to speak, and then once every few months, for a handful of days they can concentrate, they try to learn.

'But they don't have the males' [the he-anophelii's] mouthparts, obviously, so they can't make the same sounds. (*S*, pp. 392–393)

The sow-drinking she-anophelii on whom the preceding analysis of xenosomatic degradation focuses has certainly fulfilled Bellis's asserted criterion for their kinds acquisition of consciousness—that is, satedness (she 'grow[s] [...] replete'). Her dozen or so fellows who likewise slake their thirst by preying on sows of their own ostensibly do the same ('all the [other] anophelii are growing gross and tight with blood'). If, as I would contend, a handful of the women have been sated by their repast, the xenosomatic degradation in which they have concomitantly partaken has not only reinvigorated their bodies but also empowered them via a consciousness-gaining. In this scenario, the she-anophelii's xenosomatic degradation has afforded them consciousness by which they can, as Bellis notes, attempt to learn speech. Their inability to do so—that unfortunate corollary of them lacking their menfolk's mouthparts—is eclipsed by the facticity of the attempt itself: it registers xenosomatic degradation's empowering radicality concerning their minds' functionality. For the women-things, xenosomatic degradation is productive, for it imparts to the act of haematophagy an intellectual fecundity that facilitates their reclamation of autonomy.

Eclipsing the differences between the ingestive modes of xenosomatic degradation in 'Säcken', *King Rat* and *The Scar* is one commonality: they afford their initiators a reinvigoration of their xenosomas that exemplifies and/or bolsters their latitude. Owing to the carnivalistic destruction–regeneration dyad that fuels it, xenosomatic degradation of the ingestive sort has inspired beneficial change on its users' part.

2. Aesthetics and Nightmares

Perdido Street Station is a notable work in Miéville's oeuvre, for it boasts unmatched symbioses between ingestive and eliminatory veins of xenosomatic degradation. The xenosomatic entities from which these interrelated carnivalistic affairs spring are disparate

with regard to both their species and temperament. One of them is the idiosyncratic artist Lin: a khepri woman—that is, an anatomically orthodox human woman in all respects but her oversized scarab-head. The others are slake-moths: lepidoptera-things marked by an immense stature, their prehensile tongues instruments for quaffing the minds of the humans and xenians (humanoids) that they subdue with their hypnagogic wings. The types of xenosomatic ingestion–elimination symbioses that Lin and the slake-moths produce are both contextually and functionally varied.

In Lin’s case, these symbioses emerge from an aesthetics-based telos: the production of gland-art sculptures. Khepri women’s manipulation of their headscarabs’ various biological quiddities is a prerequisite for the xenosomatic degradation from which gland-art statues arise. To put it otherwise, their headscarabs ingest, metabolise and dilute gland-art paraphernalia—blocks of organic paste, colourberries—before expelling them at will and utilising them.

In New Crobuzon, the domineering crime lord Mr Motley commissions Lin to produce for him a life-sized gland-art sculpture that captures the intricacies of his hyperRemade form.¹⁷ The occasion on which Lin deploys gland-art praxis to fashion a fragment of her commission—a three-toed reptile claw belonging to her criminal-patron (one of his multifarious feet)—evokes gland-art’s rootedness in xenosomatic degradation:

¹⁷ Motley has been Remade to such a degree that Lin ‘ha[s] no clear sense of her boss, only a sense of the ragged discordance of his flesh’: a ‘lunatic anatomy’ (*PSS*, p. 94). Miéville’s account of Lin’s inaugural face-to-face encounter with Motley—an affair marked by her ‘astonishment and terror’ (*PSS*, p. 52)—is evocative:

Scraps of skin and fur and feathers swung as he moved; tiny limbs clutched; eyes rolled precariously; feelers twitched and mouths glistened. Many-coloured skeins of skin collided. A cloven hoof thumped gently against the wood floor. Tides of flesh washed against each other in violent currents. Muscles tethered by alien tendons to alien bones worked together in uneasy truce, in slow, tense motion. Scales gleamed. Fins quivered. Wings fluttered brokenly. Insect claws folded and unfolded. (*PSS*, pp. 52–53)

Owing to his inhabitancy of this flesh-palimpsest, Motley numbers among the most striking exemplars of xenosomatic hybridity in Miéville’s oeuvre.

She carried dense white sticks of the organic paste she would metabolize to make her art. She had already eaten several before arriving, and as she took visual measure of him, she would chew rapidly on another, [...] passing it through her headbody to the sac inside the hindpart of her headthorax. Her headbelly would swell visibly as she stored up her mulch.

[...] [S]he would turn back and kneel, facing her subject [Motley], opening up the little chitin case protecting her gland and fastening the nether lips at the rear of her headbody with a gentle *slup* onto the edge of the sculpture behind her.

[...] [S]he would begin gently to squeeze the thick paste from her gland, her sphincter-lips dilating and contracting and extending, rolling and smoothing the sludge into shape. She used the opalescent nacre of the khepri-spit to good effect.

[...] Lin would glance down and grab a handful of the colourberries arrayed on her pallet before her. She would take them in subtle combinations and quickly eat them [...]

The vivid juice would be spat through her headguts, down peculiar intestinal byways and into an adjunct of her main thoracic sac, and within four or five minutes she could push the mixed colour into the diluted khepri-spit. She would smear the liquid froth into careful position, slopping astonishing tones in suggestive patches and scabs, where it coagulated quickly into shape. (*PSS*, pp. 134–135, emphasis in original)

Lin's chewing, ingestion and metabolisation of the organic paste and colourberries register xenosomatic degradation's destructiveness, for doing so subjects them to denaturalisation. The regenerative component of this xenosomatic degradation finds expression in i) the swelling of Lin's headbelly owing to her devourment of the organic paste, and ii) the transmutation of the paste and subsequently devoured colourberries into composite substances bearing artistic utility (i.e., mouldable paste and a multihued liquid froth). Lin unveils the hitherto-occluded fact that ingestive xenosomatic degradation need not be circumscribed by nutritional purposes, and that its wedding with an eliminatory counterpart can endow its material products with otherwise impossible practical applications. She deploys xenosomatic degradation to engender a symbiosis between ingestion and elimination that is predicated on, and serves to reify, aesthetic ideals. By harnessing xenosomatic degradation, the gland-artist is able to bend the sensuous world to her will for creative and, given its contribution to commission-fulfilment, beneficial ends.

Lin's use of xenosomatic degradation is empowering *vis-à-vis* her identity. Among the khepri women who inhabit the ghettos by which their race is largely circumscribed in New Crobuzon, gland-art-making is a communal deed. A. E. Green posits that 'art is for community's sake', delineating community as 'a group of people who by common habitation, intermarriage, frequent face-to-face contact, shared economic interests, and similar experience, have developed for good and ill a life style [*sic*] which is identifiable both

subjectively and objectively'.¹⁸ Lin takes exception to popular gland-art within the parameters of New Crobuzon's khepri ghettos because she perceives its telos—communal consolation—to be hackneyed. For reasons that she expounds to Motley via sign language,¹⁹ Lin's oeuvre is predicated on her eschewal of the gland-art praxis espoused by the city's ghetto-dwelling khepri women:

I work alone, she signed, which is part of my . . . rebellion. [...] People [in the ghettos] were miserable, so communal art got stupidly heroic. [...] I wanted to spit out something . . . nasty. Tried to make some of the grand figures we all made together a little less perfect . . . Pissed off my sisters. So turned to my own work. Nasty work. (PSS, p. 49, emphasis in original)

Given such remarks, Lin's commission for Motley and, indeed, the totality of gland-art that she independently crafted prior to the events of *Perdido Street Station*, bespeak the sociocultural tensions between herself and New Crobuzon's other khepri women. Indeed, the imperfect, nasty composition of Lin's independently fashioned gland-art concretises her disdain for compliance with consolatory sociocultural norms. It is an outlet for her embrace of transgressive autonomy and intransigent leperhood. Insofar as the carnivalistic synergy between destruction and regeneration informs the xenosomatic degradation from which her gland-art springs, the essence of carnival is formative to, and reifies the facticity of, Lin's controversial selfhood. Each of her gland-art statues is a wordless-yet-puissant reaffirmation of her capacity to determine the shape of her life in ways that befit her principles and foster contentment.

For Lin, the triumphantly creative element of the xenosomatic degradation by which she advances her commission for Motley is marred by its coincidence with his ill-natured monologues *apropos* New Crobuzon's underworld:

Every day that she saw Mr Motley, he pulled her – unwilling as she was – into his city. He talked idly of turf wars in Griss Twist and Badside, dropped hints of gangland massacres in the heart of The Crow. [...] Lin chewed and spat and moulded and tried

¹⁸ A. E. Green, 'Popular Drama and the Mummers' Play', in *Performance and Politics in Popular Drama: Aspects of Popular Entertainment in Theatre, Film, and Television, 1800–1976*, ed. by David Bradby, Louis James, and Bernard Sharratt (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), pp. 139–166 (p. 140).

¹⁹ The totality of khepri women are precluded from verbal speech on account of their headscarabs lacking the requisite appendages. While their chymical language is sufficient to converse with their fellow khepri, they must use 'signing' if they wish to easily communicate with humans and other xenians.

not to hear the details, the nicknames of dead couriers, the safe-house addresses. Mr Motley was implicating her. It must be deliberate.

The statue grew thighs and another leg, the beginnings of a waist (insofar as Mr Motley had anything so identifiable). The colours were not naturalistic, but they were evocative and compelling, hypnotic. It was an astonishing piece, as befitted its subject.

Despite her attempts to insulate her mind, Mr Motley's blithe chat crept in, past her defences. She found herself musing on it. Horrified, she would pull her mind away, but it was an unsustainable attempt. Eventually she would find herself idly wondering who *was* more likely to win control of the very-tea clearing house in Chimer's End. She became numb. It was another defence. She let her mind pick its way dully over the dangerous information. She tried to remain studiously ignorant of its import. (*PSS*, pp. 252–253, emphasis in original)

As with Lin's aforesaid production of Motley's reptile claw-foot, xenosomatic degradation here finds expression in her chewing, spitting and moulding owing to its encompassment of an interplay between destruction and regeneration. The crux of the matter is that Motley's attempts to consolidate his employer-founded superiority to, and authority over, Lin by way of implicating her in New Crobuzon's underbelly reduces her xenosomatic degradation to disquieting, oppressive labour. Indeed, Lin is 'fearful of reflecting on her relationship with Mr Motley' and 'nervous of being anything more than an employee' (*PSS*, p. 254). Motley's monologues thus preclude Lin's ability to derive pleasure from the fact that her xenosomatic degradation has thus far produced 'an astonishing piece' of gland-art. Motley has exploited xenosomatic degradation's capacity to coincide with and sharpen verbally expressed power dynamics that unfold to the disadvantage of its practitioner. Lin's xenosomatic degradation and, hence, carnivalistic acts ensure her part in a victimising employee–employer dyad from which, given her fear of Motley, she cannot walk away.

Elsewhere in *Perdido Street Station*, the slake-moths register symbiotic forms of ingestive and eliminatory xenosomatic degradation that, unlike those implemented by Lin, are instruments for metamorphoses and self-revitalisation that affect New Crobuzon fate.

This ab-lepidopterous thread of xenosomatic degradation arises from a yet-to-be slake-moth, a caterpillar procured by Isaac Dan der Grimnebulin: the novel's human scientist-protagonist. Isaac witnesses the alien creature utilise momentous xenosomatic degradation via consumption of dreamshit: a hallucinogenic manufactured from slake-moth faeces. Xenosomatic degradation's destructive integrant is evinced by the caterpillar's fragmentation of the dreamshit—'[i]t was devouring its food like a child eating toffee-pudding at Jabber's

Feast' (*PSS*, p. 216)—and by its attendant metabolisation of it. The regenerative faculty of xenosomatic degradation finds expression in the voracious animal's ensuing biological growth and reinvigoration:

The caterpillar had at least tripled in size overnight. It was a foot long, and correspondingly fat. The faded magnificence of its coloured patches [due to starvation] had returned to their initial, burnished brilliance. With interest. The sticky-looking hairs on its tail-end were wicked-looking bristles. (*PSS*, p. 228)

Arising from this xenosomatic degradation is an interrelated sort bespoke by 'the violent process of destruction and creation' that attends the caterpillar's pupation ('The [metamorphosing] thing drew on the stored energy it had drawn from the dreamshit and powered its transformation' (*PSS*, p. 298)). The creature's 'slow, chaotic collapse of form' (*PSS*, p. 299) during this pupation captures the destructive aspect of xenosomatic degradation, for it effaces that which defined it: 'The caterpillar's swathed flesh began to break down. Legs and eyes and bristles and body-segments lost their integrity. The tubular body became fluid' (*PSS*, p. 298). While 'construct[ing] itself anew' (*PSS*, p. 299), the now-formless thing exemplifies xenosomatic degradation's faculty for regeneration: 'It folded in on itself, shaping itself out of the protean sludge of its own base matter. [...] Nerves that had unwound and dissolved suddenly spun back into skeins of sensory tissue. Features dissolved and reknitted in strange new constellations' (*PSS*, pp. 298–299). Above all, the regenerative quiddity of xenosomatic degradation is signalled by the caterpillar's 'b[i]r[th] for the second time' (*PSS*, p. 314), by its new slake-mothhood.²⁰ Ingestive xenosomatic degradation has functioned as both a catalyst and indispensable organising principle for the caterpillar's transition between disparate life cycles. The carnivalistic mechanisms that fuel xenosomatic degradation coalesce to form what its caterpillar-practitioner experiences as a favourable genus of biological remaking. Indeed, it is no longer immured in a cage, no longer a mere curio that amounts to Isaac's property and a subject of his research: it is a formidable and untrammelled predator.

²⁰ Having been weaned on artificially manipulated dreamshit, this slake-moth is bereft of its fellows' 'terrible predatory perfection': it possesses 'gnarled extremities, [its] body segments misshapen and incomplete, its weaponry stubby and mangled in the cocoon' (*PSS*, p. 577).

By virtue of birthing this slake-moth, the prevenient xenosomatic degradations also transmute the status quo *vis-à-vis* the totality of New Crobuzon's population. This cannot but be the case: it and its kin—captives of Mr Motley, factories for his production of dreamshit—are the pre-eminent lifeforms in New Crobuzon. 'They are at the top of their food chain', says Vermishank, the scientist who headed clandestine, government-approved research into the beasts. 'We're fairly sure that there are animals, in their native land, that are capable of killing them, but there are none within several thousand miles of here' (*PSS*, p. 462). To them, New Crobuzon is 'a jungle without predators', for '[e]verywhere they [are], every part of the city, every dark bridge, every five-hundred-year-old mansion, every twisting bazaar, every grotesque concrete warehouse and tower and houseboat and squalid slum and manicured park, throng[s] with food' (*PSS*, p. 319), with humans and xenians. The dreamshit-ingestion and pupation in which the slake-moth's caterpillar-self partook entails genera of xenosomatic degradation that have rendered it an apex predator. Given the quasi-lepidopteron's animalistic ungovernability and apoliticality, these carnivalistic affairs, moreover, undercut the authority of New Crobuzon's regime. They spawn an unapproved, baleful and transgressive upheaval of the city's socio-hierarchical configuration, for they propel the slake-moth into the role of a nigh-potentate.

Slake-moths exercise ingestive xenosomatic degradation that transforms their prey—whether human or xenian makes no difference—in a grievous, irrevocable fashion. The first instance of such xenosomatic degradation unfolds when one among the quartet of Motley's recently liberated slake-moths (their newborn counterpart has succoured them) devours the mind of Magesta Barbile: a government-employed scientist who reared it. Having infiltrated Magesta's abode, this slake-moth immobilises her with its prodigious, mesmeric wings (it stretches open her closed eyes, forcing her to look upon them). Now afforded free rein to quench its appetite, the beast deploys its prehensile tongue to penetrate Magesta's slack mouth, to inveigle its way into her nutrient-rich mind. The insect-thing's transferral of Magesta's subconscious to its lower bodily stratum exemplifies this xenosomatic degradation's destructiveness in two ways: i) it relegates Magesta to insentience ('her eyes dim and go out' (*PSS*, p. 445)), thus terminating her selfhood and former life; ii) the devoured mind-fragment is extirpated via metabolisation. The creature's abdominal growth proclaims the regenerative aspect of such xenosomatic degradation: 'the slake-moth's stomach

distend[ed] as it drank her dry' (*PSS*, p. 445). While Magesta's fate after this event is unspecified, it cannot but mirror that of the New Crobuzoners who Isaac thereafter stumbles across in the slake-moths' cloistered nest. Their minds, too, have been drank by the insect-things: they are 'husks', 'empty bottles': they are destined to 'drool and piss and shit their last imbecilic days or hours out' (*PSS*, p. 670). Thus, Magesta is an exemplar of the means by which the xenosomatic degradation that attends the slake-moths' preternatural dream-imbibition effaces its victims' capacity for sentience while quenching the beasts' appetite and reinvigorating them. This scientist is ultimately emblematic of a paradigm: the ab-lepidopteron's ingestive xenosomatic degradation ineluctably benefits them at the cost of quasi-killing its prey.

Inextricable from the slake-moths' ability to sustain themselves via such xenosomatic degradation is their employment of a faecal and, above all, symbiotic alternative. Having been eliminated from the beasts and descended to *terra firma*, this excrement beleaguers New Crobuzon's human and xenian inhabitants: it renders their dreams nightmares—'a pestilence, a bacillus' (*PSS*, p. 424) that 'disturb[s] their rest' (*PSS*, p. 425); it spawns an epoch in which 'the waking [...] f[i]nd themselves losing their trains of thought, drifting into fantasies and ruminations of weird, hallucinatory intensity' (*PSS*, p. 424). These outcomes manifest xenosomatic degradation's capacity for destruction. Its regenerative aspect is signalled by the inception of the city-spanning nightmares, by their 'bringing forth [of oneiric] monsters' (*PSS*, p. 425), 'animated visions of deep fears' and a 'twisted night-trap' in which 'bad [is] bad and good [is] bad' (*PSS*, p. 424). It is now possible to clarify the fashion in which the moths' ingestive xenosomatic degradation, as reflected by Magesta's fate, interacts with its eliminatory variant. The ab-lepidopteron's partaking in the eliminatory xenosomatic degradation at issue stirs within humans and xenians a mental state that renders them vessels of metaphysical nourishment—i.e., potential objects of ingestive xenosomatic degradation. As Vermishank explains to Isaac and his comrades, 'You can't see slake-moth faeces, or smell it, but you can sense it. In your dreams. It feeds them, makes them boil. And then the slake-moth feeds on them. A perfect loop' (*PSS*, p. 458, emphasis in original). To put it differently, the *sine qua non* of this sustainable ecosystem is a recurrent interface between ingestive and eliminatory styles of xenosomatic degradation. Thus, as far as the slake-moths

are concerned, xenosomatic degradation is not a capricious affair, but rather a systematic one that informs their idiosyncratic way of life.

A trio of the insect-predators are ultimately killed by means of ingestive xenosomatic degradation bound up with Isaac's crisis engine: a *sui generis* contrivance able to both harness and manipulate crisis energy—i.e., the contradictions immanent in all things. The crisis engine begets a cognitive symbiosis between Andrej (an elderly man), the Construct Council (an automaton hivemind) and the Weaver (a gargantuan spider-aesthete). Owing to this tripartite union, the crisis engine, as Isaac anticipated, discharges a storm of artificial mindwaves that the slake-moths find irresistible. The beasts gorge themselves on the sudden deluge of metaphysical nourishment; they are propelled into a trance-like state that precludes them from ceasing their repast. The engine's mindwave-output is so great, and its contents so puissant, that even their multidimensional, nigh invulnerable xenosomas cannot accommodate it. One after another, the winged predators combust-explode.

The inaugural slake-moth to meet its end in this fashion exhibits a mode of ingestive xenosomatic degradation that weightily affects New Crobuzon's population. The mental emissions ingested by the particular slake-moth with which we are concerned bespeaks xenosomatic degradation's destructiveness, for their natural, wholly abstract character is lost after they have 'poured into the moth's belly' (*PSS*, p. 790). A corollary of the eldritch animal's feast is that '[i]ts stomach swell[s]' (*PSS*, p. 790): a fleshly expansion that captures xenosomatic degradation's regenerative attribute. The insect-thing's subsequent death arises from its entrancement by, and concomitant inability to cease its devourment of, the tripartite mindwaves: 'The slake-moth immolated itself, immersed itself in the torrential blasts of [psychic] power. [...] The massive wash of mental emanations overwhelmed it. The huge and skulking creature jerked once; its belly and skull burst with wet, explosive sounds' (*PSS*, p. 790). Xenosomatic degradation is the chief organising principle for this moth-slaying: the beast's demise would not come to pass absent its engagement in this carnivalistic phenomenon. Since its mindwave-ingestion (carnivalistic destruction) and swollen belly (carnivalistic regeneration) are mere preludes to its death, the slake-moth ultimately experiences xenosomatic degradation as a deeply negative, advantage-bereft affair. Insofar as this slake-moth, alongside four of its speciesmates, has been one of New Crobuzon's unstoppable apex predators for a number of weeks, its death by way of xenosomatic

degradation carries socio-hierarchical weight. To put it otherwise, xenosomatic degradation marks a stepping stone toward Mayor Rudgutter reclaiming his preponderant power within the bounds of New Crobuzon. Above all, the slake-moth at issue reveals that ingestive xenosomatic degradation and, hence, the carnivalistic spirit, as embodied by the phenomenon's formative destruction–regeneration principle, can yield fatal self-gratification.

Following the deaths of the slake-moths in New Crobuzon, there occurs xenosomatic degradation that remedies the nightmares born of the aforementioned, faecal variant. The garuda (avian humanoid) Yagharek limns the correspondence between the moth shit's denaturisation and the end of the nightmares that have afflicted the city-state's residents:

the shit, the filthy discharge, the dream-poison of the slake-moths is sinking slowly through the æther and on into the earth. I fancy I can feel it as I lie under these dilapidated planks; it subsides gently around me, denatured by the daylight. It drifts like polluted snow through the planes that entangle the city, on through layers of materia, leeching out of our dimension and away.

And when the night comes, the nightmares have gone.

[...]

The city is cleansed in a tide of sleep. [...]

[...] [T]he sleepers and the waking are not taunted by phantoms. Their terrors are their own.

Like some unthinkable torpid giant, New Crobuzon shifts easily in its dreams.

[...]

[...] The city is returned. Transformed. (PSS, pp. 826–827, emphasis in original)

Xenosomatic degradation's destructive element is bespoke by i) the metaphysical excrements' passage through the æther and on into the earth, beyond the material dimension; and ii) by the attendant terminus of New Crobuzon's nightmare epidemic. The city's return-cum-transformation—that is, the restoration of the status quo *vis-à-vis* slumber and dreams—marks the regenerative component of xenosomatic degradation. Thus, the slake-moths' eliminatory xenosomatic degradation sparks an unprecedented nightmare-crisis for which the solution, beyond ushering in their deaths, is a non-participatory, natural vein of eliminatory xenosomatic degradation. At bottom, the ab-lepidopterons' metaphysical faeces is defined by a far-reaching, dual-purpose social power: the (un)crisisification of a city-state.

Despite their contextual and functional divergence, Lin and the slake-moths are vivid exemplifications of the ways in which a symbiotic relationship between ingestive and

eliminatory styles of xenosomatic degradation can profoundly influence sensuous and abstract realms of experience.

3. Emancipatory Fucking

The xenosomatic degradation with which Miéville's fiction abounds is not circumscribed by the realms of ingestion and excretion; it often transcends it. Transgressive fucking offers fertile ground for xenosomatic degradation. In a perspicacious manner, Hastings Donnan and Fiona Magowan argue that '[s]exual transgression is an enticing and hazardous proposition for reorganising human agency, perception and action as its inherent sense of crossing limits, amplifying margins and repositioning power can extend and transform the boundaries of [...] the self'.²¹ There are two particularly memorable exemplifications of this contention in Miéville's oeuvre: Lin's theology-subverting experimentation with pleasuresex in *Perdido Street Station* and the inaugural fucking between Angevine and Shekel—a Remade woman in her thirties and a whole boy of approximately fifteen, respectively—in *The Scar*. For reasons that will be expounded in due course, both occurrences are informed by xenosomatic degradations that render them ideologically transformative and empowering.

The pleasuresex in which Lin indulges redresses the pernicious mental effects of her adherence to the doctrine of Insect Aspect: a misogynistic khepri deity.²² Worshipers of Insect Aspect cleave to His doctrine that khepri women have been dispossessed of 'the insectile purity of God and male', that their 'ridiculous, slow, floundering bipedal bodies and minds that [teem] with the useless byways and intricacies of consciousness' spring from 'some vile flaw on the part of the first woman' (*PSS*, p. 260). In their youth, Lin and her broodsister are 'taught [by their broodma] to worship Him with a terrified fervour, and to despise their self-awareness and their soft, chitinless bodies. They [are] also taught to worship and serve their mindless brothers' (*PSS*, p. 261) – that is, two-foot scarabs bereft of

²¹ Hastings Donnan and Fiona Magowan, 'Sexual Transgression, Social Order and the Self', in *Transgressive Sex: Subversion and Control in Erotic Encounters*, ed. by Hastings Donnan and Fiona Magowan (New York: Berghahn Books, 2012), pp. 1–24 (p. 3).

²² The creation myth yoked to Insect Aspect is rooted in a prodigious mode of eliminatory xenosomatic degradation: He 'shat out the universe after eating the void' (*PSS*, p. 260). Stated otherwise, the scarab-god's devourment of vacuity marks the destructive trait of xenosomatic degradation, while His ensuing defecation exhibits the phenomenon's indivisible regeneration, for it is 'a mindless act of cosmic creation' (*PSS*, p. 260).

consciousness. Lin's experimentation with pleasuresex marks a process by which she repudiates her acceptance of the theomisogynistic principles ordained by Insect Aspect:

Her friend introduced her to pleasuresex, taught her to delight in the sensuous body below her neck. [...] Her body had been a source of shame and disgust; to engage in activities with no purpose at all except to revel in their sheer physicality had first nauseated her, then terrified, and finally liberated her. Until then she had been subjected only to headsex at her mother's behest, sitting still and uncomfortable while a male scabbled and coupled excitedly with her headscarab, in mercifully unsuccessful attempts at procreation. (*PSS*, p. 262)

This passage imparts visibility to a fruitful correspondence between xenosomatic degradation and pleasuresex's transgressiveness *vis-à-vis* Insect Aspect. Lin's mental 'liberat[ion]' serves to manifest xenosomatic degradation's power of destruction: it effaces her flesh-rooted self-loathing—the conviction that her body is shameful, disgusting—and her subjection to Insect Aspect's doctrine. The 'liberat[ion]' in question is the coterminous basis for an expression of xenosomatic degradation's regenerative potential. Stated otherwise, Lin's theomisogynistic perspective of her hybrid body gives way to a neoteric sort, one that is contrarily predicated on self-compassion. A transgressive variety of sexual xenosomatic degradation, Lin reveals, can be a weighty method for resisting and neutralising the corollaries of theopatriarchal oppression.

On the inaugural occasion that Angevine and Shekel fuck in *The Scar*, there unfolds xenosomatic degradation by which the latter undergoes emotional and ideological reconfigurations unlike those that Lin derives from pleasuresex. Angevine's Remaking has purloined her legs; they abruptly terminate after the first two inches of her thighs. The biothaumaturge who Remade her has attached to these flesh-stumps a little steam-powered wain with continuous tracks, its boiler freighted with wood and coke – fuel that must be replenished to accommodate what limited mobility she possesses. As with the preponderance of New Crobuzoners, Shekel holds an ingrained aversion to Remade, albeit it one that has of late been problematised by his lust for Angevine. Their lovemaking transpires in the flotilla-city Armada, which, unlike New Crobuzon, positions its Remade inhabitants as equals to those who are whole. The xenosomatic degradation that coincides with this coitus resolves the tensions between Shekel's New Crobuzoner values and his attraction to Angevine.

The revolutionary character of this xenosomatic degradation is foretold by Shekel's mental reconfiguration in the moments before he and Angevine fuck:

She was Remade she was (Remade scum), he knew it, he saw it, and still he felt incessantly what was inside him, and he felt a great scab of habit and prejudice split from him, part from his skin where his homeland [New Crobuzon] had inscribed him deep.

Heal me, he thought, not understanding what he thought, hoping for a reconfiguration. There was a caustic pain as he peeled off a clot of old life and exposed himself open and unsure to her, to new air. Breathing fast again. His feelings welled out and bled together (their festering ceased) and they began to resolve, to heal in a new form, to scar.

—My Remade girl, he said wondering, and she forgave him that, instantly, because she knew he would not think it again.

It was not easy, with the stubs of her legs pinioned in metal, in a tight V, parted only slightly, with only two inches of the inside of her thighs below her cunt in flesh, she could not open to him or lie back.

But they persevered, and succeeded. (S, p. 154, emphasis in original)

Shekel's penetration of Angevine's vagina exhibits xenosomatic degradation's destructiveness by reifying the facticity of him having 'peeled off a clot of old life', of 'a great scab of habit and prejudice [having] split from him, part[ed] from his skin where his homeland ha[s] inscribed him deep'. Xenosomatic degradation's regenerative power is evoked by this act's reification of two further things: i) Shekel's fulfilled 'hop[e] for a [mental] reconfiguration' and ii) his acceptance of Angevine's Remadehood, which derives from his tension-ridden feelings having 'beg[un] to resolve, to heal in a new form, to scar'. For New Crobuzoners, whole-and-Remade fucking, as laid bare in Chapter Two, is a transgressive affair owing to the underclass of which the convict-grotesques are part. Shekel doubtless understands this, hence his pre-coital acknowledgement that his physical attraction to Angevine is at odds with her status as 'Remade scum'. Shekel's intercourse with Angevine is a New Crobuzoner transgression marked by xenosomatic degradation that begets a traumatic-but-virtuous ideological shift. The destructive and regenerative workings of this xenosomatic degradation synergise with one another to facilitate Shekel's deliverance from his entrenched prejudice against Remade. Xenosomatic degradation has conjured ideological scarification by which the hitherto-conflicted teenager gains the power to hold an unconditional passion for Angevine. It affords Shekel the opportunity to develop a compassionate worldview that his New Crobuzoner values obstructed, terminating his homeland's repressive sway over him. At bottom, it is a deeply positive brand of formative experience.

The differences in race, age and sex *vis-à-vis* Lin and Shekel are eclipsed by their apprehension and tapping of the liberatory possibilities endogenous to xenosomatic degradation because of its carnivalistic ambivalence. The khepri heretic-pariah and human teenager, respectively, cast a light on the means by which crisis-ridden individuals can mobilise sexual permutations of xenosomatic degradation to surmount persecution both within and without New Crobuzon.

4. Mutilation

Beyond ingestion, elimination and fucking lies another method for xenosomatic degradation: mutilation. Stuart Hall offers a pertinent exposition of the means by which otherness shapes identities:

Above all, [...] identities are constructed through, not outside, difference. This entails the radically disturbing recognition that it is only through the relation to the Other, the relation to what it is not, to precisely what it lacks, to what has been called its *constitutive outside* that the ‘positive’ meaning of any term – and thus its ‘identity’ – can be constructed.²³

Miéville’s oeuvre boasts fictions with mutilative forms of xenosomatic degradation that register Hall’s posited correlation between identity and otherness. There are two vivid manifestations of this contention: i) the Absurdian leader in *Embassytown* that tears out the fanwing belonging to a fellow Arieke—a biorigging-farmhand—in a televised display of hatred for Terre, particularly god-drug EzCal; and ii) Yagharek’s self-mutilation in *Perdido Street Station* as part of an attempt to subvert the rightful juridical punishment that he suffered in his homeland. These xenosomatic degradations give rise to momentous transformations of body and identity.

Given that it is steeped in negativity, the televised vein of mutilative xenosomatic degradation performed by the Absurdian leader is a judicious point of departure. Avice watches this broadcast, providing a germane account of its gruesome content:

²³ Stuart Hall, ‘Who Needs “Identity?”’, in *Questions of Cultural Identity*, ed. by Stuart Hall and Paul Du Gay (London: SAGE, 1996; repr. London: SAGE, 2003), pp. 1–17 (pp. 4–5, emphasis in original).

The big Arieques [the leader] tugged the biorigging-farmer's fanwing. [...] It twisted. Its victim screamed doubly and tried and failed to get away. Its tormentor's giftwing moved like a human hand uprooting a plant. The fanwing wrenched free: roots of gristle and muscle parted and with a burst of blood came finally free, pulling fibres out of the quivering back, trailing them.

Fanwings are at least as sensitive as human eyes. The traumatised Arieques opened its mouth and fell, stupefied with pain. It was dragged away. The deafener held up its grotesque dripping bouquet. It made a loud wordless noise. Triumph or rage. (*E*, p. 315)

As illustrated in the preceding chapter, fanwings are hearing organs that concurrently function as the principal doorways to Arieke minds and, thus, to Language—i.e., to the Ariekei's indispensable, inextricable association between thought, speech and world. The fanwing-extraction performed by the Absurdian leader reflects xenosomatic degradation's destructiveness because it divests the farmhand of its fleshly totality, its hearing and, above all, its connection to Language. The regenerative aspect of this xenosomatic degradation lies in said destruction's concomitant spawning of a fanwingless body for the farmhand-Arieques, and in the now-deafened creature's relegation to what is, in human terms, a form of insanity by which it is assimilated into Absurdian ranks, into '[a]n unsociety of psychopaths' (*E*, p. 318). Here, to be more precise, occurs a fanwing-theft and anatomical remaking—or Absurdification—predicated on a carnivalistic death and rebirth. This mutilative variant of xenosomatic degradation is striking owing to the fact that its regenerative carnivalistic pole imitates its destructive antithesis's balefulness. Indeed, the biorigging-farmer derives from this affair a body that is experienced as a profound loss and source of misery, for it is defanwinged and isolated from Language, affording the creature little choice but to reconcile itself to Absurdhood. Mutilation, the Arieques shows, is susceptible to involving xenosomatic degradation that lacks a regenerative component from which something greater or better arises. This phenomenon's immanent carnivalistic destruction/regeneration dyad, therefore, is naught but an instrument for suffering and disempowerment.

Nonetheless, this mutilative style of xenosomatic degradation, as far as its Absurdian enactor and peers are concerned, has a beneficial socio-political purpose. '[E]xtraordinary bodily forms have [...] cultural resonances accorded them [that] arise from the historical and intellectual moments in which these bodies are embedded', says Rosemarie Garland Thompson; they 'become politicized when culture maps its concerns upon them as

meditations on individual as well as national values, identity, and direction'.²⁴ The relevant xenosomatic degradation in *Embassytown* is a science-fictional expression of this contention, insofar as its deliberate performance in plain view of Terre cameras politicises the farmer's de-fanwinged and, thus, extraordinary body in two fashions. The first is that it demonstrate the Absurd's hostility to EzCal's *de facto* rulership of their hearing (fanwing-bearing) speciesmates via ruinously addictive god-drug Language. The second is that it marks a conscious, successful attempt to buttress the ranks of the thousand-strong Absurdian army bent on a genocidal revolution against the Terre. 'That final mutilation, by one Ariekees of another, was a recruitment', Avice illustratively recollects. 'If the victim survived the shock and pain, it was made another soldier, on the enemy side' (*E*, p. 316). Thus, the Ariekeene farmhand's subjection to a mutilative form of xenosomatic degradation is ultimately weaponised by the Absurd in a beneficial fashion, as it transmutes the biorigging-farmer's body into an instrument for Absurdian radicalism.

Yagharek's self-mutilation in *Perdido Street Station* entails a form of xenosomatic degradation that is by far more sanguine than the Absurdian farmhand-mutilation. For the nomadic garuda tribes of Yagharek's homeland, the Cymek Desert, choice-theft violates the putative belief that individuals constitute fragments of a social matrix.²⁵ A prerequisite for the functionality of this matrix is that each node-person respects the individuality of, and the choices available to, all others in any given situation. A tribesperson perpetrates choice-theft when they act in a manner that precludes their fellow/s from executing any number of choices available to them (*PSS*, pp. 847–848). Yagharek is guilty of choice-theft in the highest degree: he has committed what the preponderance of sentient Bas-Lagians, and we ourselves, cannot but construe as rape. Nevertheless, Yagharek's victim, Kar'uchai, notes that apprehending the offence as such is impolitic according to garuda law, for it was not, strictly speaking, its invasive physicality that warranted his punishment, but rather the choices of which it has deprived her. The bird-man's punishment is twofold: the pair of wings embedded in his back

²⁴ Rosemarie Garland Thompson, 'From Wonder to Terror—A Genealogy of Freak Discourse in Modernity', in *Freakery: Cultural Spectacles of the Extraordinary Body*, ed. by Rosemarie Garland Thompson (New York: New York University Press, 1996), pp. 1–19 (p. 2).

²⁵ 'With the [Cymek Desert-dwelling] garuda', says Miéville in an interview with Cheryl Morgan, 'I tried to come up with a society that was radically communist, and because of its communism treats the individual with great seriousness and respect' (Cheryl Morgan, 'Interview: China Miéville', *Strange Horizons*, 1 October 2001 <[Strange Horizons - Interview: China Miéville By Cheryl Morgan](#)> [accessed 19 October 2025]).

are dismembered, and he is banished from his nomadic community. Having received news of Yagharek's offence from Kar'uchai herself, Isaac reneges on his promise to furnish him with a neoteric mode of flight by exploiting crisis energy. Perched atop a high-rise from which he surveys New Crobuzon, a dolorous Yagharek resolves that he will no longer tolerate his existential liminality: *'I will not be this cripple, this earthbound bird, any longer'* (PSS, p. 864, emphasis in original), he declaims. Yagharek tears from his flesh the quills that betray his garudahood and, by doing so, avails himself of identity-altering xenosomatic degradation

The injuries born of this act proclaim the destructiveness of xenosomatic degradation because they further diminish Yagharek's ornithic traits. He demonstratively rehearses his self-inflicted wounds: *'My face [is] a mass of raw and ragged flesh, bleeding copiously from a hundred little punctures where the feathers left my flesh'*, he divulges, adding, *'My eyes peer out from bald, pink, ruined skin, blistered and sickly. [...] My feet are constricted again by filthy strips of rag, [...] [t]he fringes of feathers that segued into their scales [...] ripped clean. [...] [M]y groin [is] as raw [...] as my head'* (PSS, p. 866, emphasis in original). The destructive element of Yagharek's self-mutilative xenosomatic degradation resolves his long-standing identity crisis by terminating what he regards as the faux garudahood with which his juridical winglessness burdens him: *'I am not the earthbound garuda any more [sic]'*, he opines. *'That one is dead'* (PSS, p. 867, emphasis in original). Nonetheless, the facticity of Yagharek having killed his garuda self via xenosomatic degradation is by no means unquestionable. The bandit-insurrectionist Jack Half-a-Prayer holds an estimation of the self-mutilated, man-aspirant Yagharek that a contingent of those who have read *Perdido Street Station* no doubt accept: *'He sees another broken-down half-thing, [...] another for whom existence in any world is impossible, a paradox, a bird that cannot fly'* (PSS, p. 866, emphasis in original). In some measure, Half-a-Prayer's assessment is incontrovertibly true. Yagharek himself concedes that his desperate endeavour to slough off his avian flesh has been partially fruitful at best: *'Tenacious fluffs of down that I have missed patch me like stubble. [...] I tried to break my beak, but I could not'* (PSS, p. 866, emphasis in original). Irrespective of whether one agrees with Yagharek's assertion *vis-à-vis* the demise of his garudahood, one thing is certain: xenosomatic degradation's capacity for destruction, as expressed in self-mutilation, effects a profound remaking of his flesh.

The regenerative property of this carnivalistic wound-making finds expression in Yagharek's self-avowed obtainment of *'new flesh'* (PSS, p. 866, emphasis in original). In other words, it spawns an amplified form of human-adjacent body that liberates him from the earthbound and, therefore, dysfunctional garuda antecedent that precludes his self-respect. *'This is a new life'*, he illustratively declares. *'I have torn the misleading quills from my skin and made it smooth, and below that avian affectation, I am the same as my citizen fellows. I can live foresquare [sic] in one world'* (PSS, p. 867, emphasis in original). The *'new flesh'* that Yagharek fashions for himself via self-mutilative xenosomatic degradation allows him to reclaim a sense of latitude, to reorient his life: *'I turn and walk into the city my home [New Crobuzon], not bird or garuda, not miserable crossbreed. I turn and walk into my home, the city, a man'* (PSS, p. 867, emphasis in original). Yagharek's self-mutilation emerges as a beneficial xenosomatic degradation by virtue of it affording him otherwise impossible self-affirmation and a potential measure of sociosomatic integration into humankind.

The Absurdian leader's political farmhand-mutilation and Yagharek's self-mutilation reconfigure bodies and identities in (dis)advantageous fashions due to xenosomatic degradation's carnivalistic destruction–regeneration system. These Bakhtinian-Miévillian happenings endow physical trauma with disparate social utilities; having been carnivalised, wounds become mediums for lasting change.

5. Bas-Lagian Remakings

In Miéville's Bas-Lag fictions, xenosomatic degradation attends New Crobuzon's officialdom-sanctioned disciplinary praxis styled Remaking: the thaumaturgy-effected alteration of convicts' bodies in accordance with magister-dictated sentences. The city-state's government functionaries disdain the compassionate applications of Remaking—*'[o]f course, the [act's constituent] techniques could heal and repair'* (PSS, p. 210)—in favour of relegating its exponents to lepers, to begrudging members of an underclass comprised of indentured workers and slaves. The xenosomatic degradations that coincide with the Remakings of Tanner Sack—the mutiny-instigating *parrhesiastes* who features in *The Scar* (see Chapter One)—and the outlaw-revolutionary Jack Half-a-Prayer, as described in Miéville's short story *'Jack'*, operate as conduits for jurisprudence-subverting rehabilitation. Both of these men are

New Crobuzoners for whom Remaking-determined forms of xenosomatic degradation variously give rise to empowerment.

Tanner's law-imposed Remaking in New Crobuzon and his concomitant exposure to xenosomatic degradation enfeeble him. As punishment for his part in an unspecified offence, a Remaker embeds a pair of long tentacles in his chest 'at the caprice of a New Crobuzon magister' (*S*, p. 115). These elongated flesh-appendages are 'supposedly related to his crime according to some patronizing allegorical logic which ha[s] never made any sense to him' (*S*, pp. 115–116). The Remaker who biothaumaturgically implants the tentacles in Tanner's chest terminates the wholeness of his body, hence utilising xenosomatic degradation's destructive integrant. Coterminous with this punitive act is the regenerative trait of xenosomatic degradation: Tanner's body is rendered ab-human via its exposure to species-based hybridisation. The corollaries of his juridical Remaking are pernicious. Until Tanner's discovery that brine heals and allows him to control them,²⁶ his unsought tentacles are 'lifeless, deadweight blubbery encumbrances' (*S*, p. 32) that constitute an affliction; indeed, they 'itched and shed skin like severe sunburn' (*S*, p. 37). Tanner's Remaking, moreover, thrusts him into slavery. New Crobuzon's officials decide that he will spend the remainder of his life as a slave-worker in the fledgling colony Nova Esperium: a fate from which he is spared when the Crobuzoner merchant vessel transporting him there is commandeered by Armadans. Tanner is a victim of the means by which New Crobuzon's officialdom exploits the transformative and carnivalistic-ambivalent mechanisms of xenosomatic degradation for sadistic, debilitating ends via the imposition of Remaking.

Occurring in Armada, Tanner's second Remaking and accompanying xenosomatic degradation are counterposed to their antecedents due to their sanguine rationale. Tanner's aversion to the restrictive apparatus on which he depends to discharge his assigned labour as a diver-engineer in Armada rouses his yearning to be Remade into a sea creature:

He had seen with envy how Bastard John the dolphin [Armada's underwater security chief] policed his watch, passing through the brine with unique motion [...], or as cray

²⁶ By virtue of Tanner repeatedly submerging them in brine, his tentacle-limbs eventually become 'as strong and almost as prehensile as his arms and hands' (*S*, p. 176).

[lobster-people] from their half-sunk ships or the unclear menfish from Bask riding launched themselves into the water uncontained by harnessing or chains.

When he left the sea, Tanner felt his tentacles hang heavy and uncomfortable. But when he was below, in his harness, his leather and brass, he felt tethered and constrained. He wanted to swim free, across and up into the light and even, yes, even down, into the cold and silent darkness. (*S*, pp. 176–177)

Having sought out and paid an Armadan chirurgeon—a practitioner of biothaumaturgy—willing to perform the relevant body modifications, Tanner’s desire is fulfilled. Unlike its New Crobuzoner precursor, the Remaking in question proceeds neither from a juridical penalty nor an allegorical magister-logic that Tanner cannot apprehend. Rather, ‘[t]his [additional procedure] was truly and completely what he wanted to do. And with a great happiness he understood that it was [...] only because the process and the decision were, completely and uniquely and without confusion, his own’ (*S*, p. 177). Tanner’s Remaking in Armada positions xenosomatic degradation as a method for reclaiming a measure of the bodily autonomy that the New Crobuzoner magister and Remaker purloined from him. By virtue of electing to be Remade into a sea creature, Tanner has leveraged the anti-authority and empowering possibilities of xenosomatic degradation.

Each chirurgeon-effected modification to Tanner’s body fuels this xenosomatic degradation. The chirurgeon scores gashes into both sides of Tanner’s neck; he fashions for him a concatenation of ‘new passageways’ and ‘new orifices’ (*S*, p. 212), using a hex to graft stabilising muscle where necessary; he furnishes him with animal components:

The chirurgeon peeled back Tanner’s eyelids, and bound to him clear nictitating taken and modified from a cayman [...] He injected Tanner with particulate lifeforms that thrived in him harmlessly, and interacted with his body, making his sweat a touch more oleaginous, to warm him and slide him through water. He grafted in a little ridge of muscle at the base of Tanner’s nostrils, and little nubs of cartilage, so that he could flex them closed.

[...] Between Tanner’s fingers and his thumb, he stretched a membrane, a web of rubbery skin that he pinched into position, tethering it in Tanner’s epidermis. He removed Tanner’s toes, and replaced them with the fingers from a cadaver, sewing and sealing them on to Tanner’s foot until he looked simian; then changing the resemblance from ape to frog as he stretched more webbing between those once-more living digits. (*S*, p. 214)

Each of the chirurgeon's aforescribed deeds signal his deployment of xenosomatic degradation, for while they destroy fragments of Tanner's human anatomy, they concomitantly or soon thereafter contribute to its sea-creaturely regeneration.

The chirurgeon, moreover, employs xenosomatic degradation to transmute Tanner's neck gashes into gills by means of esoteric apparatus that links him to a sedated cod. While the chirurgeon mutters a series of hexes, brine-diluted homeomorphic chymicals are sluiced across the cod's gills and then through Tanner's neck lacerations (*S*, pp. 212–213). Before sealing these wounds, the chirurgeon disconnects Tanner and the cod from his machinery: 'the cod d[ies] instantly, its body shrunken and wrinkled' (*S*, p. 213). The fish's subjection to atrophy and, eventually, death on account of its thaumaturgic amalgamation with Tanner bespeaks xenosomatic degradation's destructive pole. Tanner's neck gashes metamorphose into functional gills owing to the cod's ruination:

Without Tanner waking – still drugged as he was, there was no danger of that – the chirurgeon placed a mask over his mouth, sealed his nose with his fingers, and began to pump brine gently into him. For several seconds there was no reaction. Then Tanner coughed and gagged violently, spattering water. The chirurgeon stood poised, ready to release Tanner's nose.

And then Tanner calmed, all without waking, his epiglottis flexed and his windpipe constricted, keeping the saltwater from entering his lungs, and the chirurgeon smiled as water began to seep from Tanner's new gills.

It came sluggishly at first, bringing with it blood and dirt and scab-matter. And then the water ran clean and the gills began to flex, regulating it, and it pulsed across the floor in measured draughts. Tanner Sack was breathing water. (*S*, pp. 213–214)

The engillification of Tanner's neck lacerations—his emergent faculty for breathing saltwater—exemplifies xenosomatic degradation's regenerative function because it is traceable to its antithesis (that is, the cod's withering and demise).

The aforescribed xenosomatic degradations thwart an attempt on the part of New Crobuzon's judiciary to have the final, repressive say on Tanner's bodily composition. The carnivalistic spirit, as bespoke by xenosomatic degradation, affords him a desire-fulfilling metamorphosis that also constitutes an exercise in law-subverting agency.

Given its indivisibility from Tanner's new Remaking, xenosomatic degradation is responsible for his acquirement of the subaqueous empowerment that he sought:

When he had worn his diving suit, he had been an intruder. He had challenged the sea, and he had worn armour. Clinging to the rungs and guyropes, hanging on for life, and knowing that the endless space below him that stretched out like a maw was exactly that. A mouth the size of the world, straining to swallow him.

Now he swam free, descending towards darkness that no longer seemed to hunger for him.

[...]

He struggled to overcome his [underwater] vertigo, he made it something else. No less awe, but less fear. He took what was like fear in him, and made it humility.

I'm damn small, he thought, [...] in a sea that's damn big. But that's all right. I can do that. (S, pp. 230–231, emphasis in original)

Tanner's untrammelled and pleasurable traversal of the sea marks his successful tapping of the emancipatory possibilities belonging to Remaking-born xenosomatic degradation. Insofar as it facilitates a re-evaluation of his place in Bas-Lag's subaqueous realm and attenuates his fear of its looming depths, it is mentally productive. His inhabitancy of the newborn, aquatic xenosoma brought forth by xenosomatic degradation has settled his inimical and otherwise insurmountable relationship to the sea.

As with Tanner, the man who becomes Jack Half-a-Prayer suffers a juridical Remaking in New Crobuzon, turning its attendant xenosomatic degradation to his advantage. A Remaker divests Half-a-Prayer of his right hand, after which his assistant holds an immense mantis claw against the concomitant flesh-stump while he utilises a hex that inspires 'the flesh and scute [to] run together and alloy'.²⁷ Insofar as the thaumaturgic extraction and replacement of Half-a-Prayer's right hand irrevocably disrupts his anatomical wholeness—that is, imposes on it a species-rooted hybridity—it proclaims xenosomatic degradation's faculty for destruction. The mantis claw's union with Half-a-Prayer's flesh, meanwhile, betokens xenosomatic degradation's regenerative power, for it marks the birth of his 'new body' ('J', p. 202). This punitive brand of xenosomatic degradation was envisaged as a method of disempowering Half-a-Prayer; nevertheless, it serves a contrary end. The unnamed narrator of Miéville's short story—the aforesaid Remaker's assistant, it is revealed—illustratively recollects that the now-dead Half-a-Prayer was an extraordinary figure because 'Remaking is the ruin of most, but it was the making of him' ('J', p. 205). Indeed, Half-a-Prayer uses the great mantis claw that he derives from his Remaking and, hence, xenosomatic degradation,

²⁷ China Miéville, 'Jack', in *Looking for Jake and Other Stories* (London: Pan Books, 2006), pp. 201–212 (p. 212). Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text.

into a flesh-weapon against New Crobuzon's regime. It serves as a bio-implement for his commitment to insurrection. 'Turning your Remaking on the Remakers, that ain't how it's supposed to be' ('J', p. 206), the assistant-storyteller points out, later adding, 'It wasn't alright for Jack to think he could touch the functionaries of the government. I know that's how they thought' ('J', p. 209). Half-a-Prayer, to be more precise, dispatches Milita agents—clandestine tools for government oppression, at this juncture in Bas-Lag's history—with his unsought, reappropriated mantis claw ('Awful wounds [are found] on both sides of their necks, as if ragged, serrated scissors had half closed on them' ('J', p. 209)). Half-a-Prayer, then, instantiates the fact that the corollaries of a forced exposure to xenosomatic degradation need not align with those desired by official entities. Stated otherwise, he lays bare xenosomatic degradation's potential to functionally undermine a sanctioned, pre-ordained debilitation of its objects. In Half-a-Prayer's case, a devotion to anti-government politics is fertile ground for an unexpected gleaning of power from xenosomatic degradation.

To the extent that Half-a-Prayer's weaponisation of his great mantis claw against New Crobuzon's regime earns him the adoration of the masses, his Remaking-founded xenosomatic degradation carries remarkable social weight. The Remaker's assistant pertinently limns the public's sentiments regarding Half-a-Prayer:

This [New Crobuzon] is the greatest city in the world. You hear that all the time, because its true. But it's sort of an untrue truth, for a lot of us.

I don't know where you live. If it's Dog Fenn, then knowing that Parliament's a building like nothing else, or that we've riches in the coffers that would make the rest of the world jealous, or that the scholars of New Crobuzon could outthink the bloody gods—knowing all that doesn't do so much. You still live in Dog Fenn, or Badside [two of New Crobuzon's disadvantaged districts], or what have you.

But when Jack ran, the city was the greatest for Badside too. You could see it—I could see it—in the way people walked, after Jack'd done something. Where the houses lean in to each other, where the bricks shed pointing, in the shadow of the glass cactus ghetto, people walked tall. Jack was everyone's: men and women, cactus-people, khepri and vod [vodyanoi]. The wyrmen made up songs about him. The same people that would spit in the face of a Remade beggar cheered this fReemade. In [the New Crobuzon district] Salacus Fields they'd toast Jack by name. ('J', pp. 204–205)

To put it differently, the xenosomatic degradation that produced Half-a-Prayer is notable since it catalyses misdeeds—e.g., stealing taxes from a government office ('J', p. 202), sewing up the mouth of a brutal foundry supervisor ('J', p. 204), the aforescribed Militia-

slaying—by which he nurtures a multiracial, anti-officialdom solidarity among New Crobuzon’s marginalised and/or downtrodden commonfolk. Xenosomatic degradation’s carnivalistic destruction/regeneration dyad, Half-a-Prayer shows, can serve as a mediated prerequisite for a popular dissident relationality.

Here, too, is a correspondence between private ab-carnivalism (the notion introduced in the preceding chapter via Surl Tesh-echer’s falsehood-telling) and xenosomatic degradation. From the moment that Half-a-Prayer’s insurrectionist activities garner him the acclaim of New Crobuzon’s humble social strata, he experiences a figurative, self-applicable ab-carnivalistic crowning–decrowning. This facticity of this affair is implicitly conveyed by the Remaker’s assistant: ‘I knew it couldn’t last, Jack’s reign (because that’s what it was)’ (‘J’, p. 210), he divulges. Half-a-Prayer’s ab-carnivalistic reign is problematic since it inadvertently reproduces Bakhtinian carnival’s preservation of the status quo. This contention is borne out by the assistant’s description of what Half-a-Prayer’s insurrection achieved with regard to New Crobuzon’s commonfolk:

People need something, you know, to escape. They do. They need something to make them feel free. It’s good for us, it’s necessary. The city needs it. [...]

People have their heroes, and gods know I don’t grudge them that. It ain’t a surprise. They—the people I mean—don’t know how hard it is to keep a city, a state like New Crobuzon going, why some of the things that get done get done. It can be harsh. If Jack gives people a reason to keep going, they should have it. So long as it don’t get out of hand, which, of course, it always does. That’s why he had to be stopped. But there’ll be another one, with more big shows, more grand gestures and thefts and the like. People need that.

I’m grateful to Jack and his kin. If they weren’t there, [...] and all them angry people in [the city’s districts of] Dog Fenn and Kelltree and Smog Bend had no one to cheer on, gods know what they’d do. That would be much worse. (‘J’, pp. 211–212)

Half-a-Prayer’s ab-carnivalistic rulership of New Crobuzon, the Remaker’s assistant shows, fulfils Bakhtinian carnival’s status-quo-preserving function by affording the masses a vicarious pleasure that defers an attempted revolution on their part. Thus, the xenosomatic degradation that spawned Half-a-Prayer’s Remadehood is foundational to an emotionally productive form of communal vicariousness that is simultaneously and, above all, counterproductive to radical change.

Tanner's second, volitional Remaking in Armada and Half-a-Prayer's Remaking-as-punishment have concretised a latent utility of xenosomatic degradation's carnivalistic mechanisms: their power to accommodate anti-official, novel genera of life-making.

6. Untrammelled Proteanism

Embedded in Miéville's oeuvre are two species of xenosomatic degradation that boast applications and possibilities far more fecund than any that have hitherto been dissected. As with their methods, the practitioners of these xenosomatic degradations are disparate. One is the ever-mutable protagonist of Miéville's short story 'Familiar'—a magicked Londoner-thing derived from elements of its witch-creator, from 'scraps of fat and flesh, coagulated with [...] sputum, cum, and hoodoo'²⁸—whereas the other is an enfleshed, Surrealist artwork: an exquisite corpse in Miéville's novella *The Last Days of New Paris*.

The London-dwelling familiar boasts the capacity for limitless xenosomatic degradation on account of it being an entity for which the world comprises 'infinite tools' ('F', p. 86). It serves as 'a channel for manipulation; it liv[e]s to change, use, and know' ('F', p. 85). The witch who conjured the familiar cannot abide the revulsion that it stirs within him: he places the conduit-thing into a sack that he then deposits in a London waterway. When it escapes from its hessian prison, the familiar emerges as a practitioner of xenosomatic degradation by which it satisfies its *raison d'être*.

It does so in manifold fashions. By way of illustration, the destructive element of xenosomatic degradation is marked by the familiar's lethal interaction with a number of fish that inhabit the canal to which it was banished: 'It took a few [of those creatures] carefully apart' ('F', p. 86). Xenosomatic degradation's regenerative trait is reflected by the magicked thing's transmutation of the dead fishes' eyes into 'new vitreous machines'—i.e., '[i]t sucked [their extracted] eyes into itself and suddenly [...] visual signals reached it for the first time'—and its use of their ribs to enhance its mobility: 'It embedded them in its skin (its minute and random blood vessels and muscle fibres insinuating into the bone). It used them to walk, with the sedate pick-picking motion of an urchin' ('F', p. 86). This xenosomatic

²⁸ China Miéville, 'Familiar', in *Looking for Jake and Other Stories* (London: Macmillan, 2005), pp. 81–96 (p. 84). Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text.

degradation, moreover, induces a regeneration of how it perceives the animals: the familiar ‘learn[s] to use’ (‘F’, p. 86) the fish that it has ensnared and dissected. The familiar hereafter subjects London’s terrestrial fauna to xenosomatic degradation:

It found a nest of mice and examined their parts. Their tales it took for prehensile tentacles; their whiskers bristled it; it upgraded its [piscine] eyes and learned to use ears. It compared what it found to dust, blades, water, twigs, fish ribs, and sodden rubbish: it learned mouse.

[...]

[...] If an attacker did not run fast enough, the familiar would learn it. It would be used. The familiar had brittle fingertips, made of dogs’ teeth.

[...]

Sometimes it used its tools like their original owners, as when it took its legs from birds (scampering over burnt-out cars like a rock rabbit on four or six avian feet). It could change them. In sun, the familiar shaded its eyes with flanges of skin that had been cats’ ears. (‘F’, pp. 87–88)

Xenosomatic degradation’s destructiveness is signalled by the familiar’s killing and dissection of the mice, dog/s, birds and cats. The burgeoning of the familiar’s compositeness—that is, its obtainment of prehensile tentacles, whiskers, murine eyes, teeth-fingertips, avian feet and cat-ear-sunshades—exemplifies xenosomatic degradation’s regenerative power. The preternatural thing’s acquisition of knowledge concerning its prey and the flesh-components that it steals from them exhibits the affair’s faculty for mental regeneration. For the familiar, the infliction of xenosomatic degradation on material things is a fruitful activity, for it invariably yields an expansion of both its flesh and knowledge. Xenosomatic degradation has become a perpetually useful instrument for change.

A subsequent and particularly weighty instance of the familiar exercising xenosomatic degradation occurs when it impales an ancient, larger member of its kind with an oesophagus-appendage, to triumph against it in combat. The principal dynamic of this battle is an interchange of flesh:

It ballooned cavities in itself, gaping vacuums at the ends of its new pipe intestine. The suction pinioned its [elder] enemy, and tore chunks of bloody matter from it. The familiar drew them through the buried duct, up into its own body. Like a glutton it swigged them.

The trapped old one [...] could not pull itself free, and the pipe was too braced in earth to tear away. [...] [W]ith all the tissue it had lost to the usurper, they were now equal in mass, and now the newcomer was bigger, and now bigger still.

Tissue passed in fat pellets into the swelling young familiar sitting anchored by impromptu guts. Venting grave little breaths, the ancient one shrivelled and broke apart, sucked into a plughole. The cobweb of its veins dried up from all its borrowed limbs and members, and they disaggregated, nothing but hubcaps again, and butcher's remnants, a dead television, tools, mechanical debris, all brittle and sucked clean of life. [...]

[...]

It [the protagonist-familiar] metabolised much of the flesh matter it had ingested, burnt it away (and the older familiar's memories, of self-constitution on Victorian slag-heaps, troubled it like indigestion. But it was still severely bloated. It pierced its distended body with broken glass to let out pressure, but all that oozed out of it was its new self. ('F', pp. 91–93)

The juvenile familiar's disruption of its imposing adversary's wholeness by purloining fragments of its tissue registers the destructive marrow of xenosomatic degradation. The ancient familiar's demise and the disaggregation of its limbs and members owing to this flesh-theft further exhibit xenosomatic degradation's immanent destructiveness. The young familiar's concurrent transcension of its foe's formidable proportions emblematises xenosomatic degradation's regenerative quality (indeed, it finds itself inhabiting a 'new self'), as does its obtainment of that slain thing's memories. The familiar-protagonist's employment of this Bakhtinian-Miévillian phenomenon is a doorway to vanquishing 'the alpha' ('F', p. 90), a 'monstrous old potentate' ('F', p. 91). The dauntless young familiar's weaponisation of xenosomatic degradation—of counterposed-yet-symbiotic carnivalistic facets—aids the defeat of an otherwise insurmountable foe while yielding physical and socio-hierarchical change. It has given rise to a self-beneficial upheaval in familiar-oriented power relations.

Each of the familiar's aforesaid xenosomatic degradations contribute to a subversion of the power relations that typically inform familiar–witch dyads. The protean familiar's master seeks it out, begging it to return to his service, for while its body has greatly expanded via its manipulations of the world and, thus, xenosomatic degradation, his own has atrophied in a preternatural fashion:

The witch tore off his shirt. 'You been *growing*. You been fucking *growing* you won't stop, and I can't do nothing without you now and you're *killing* me.'

[...] The man's body was faded away in random holes. There was no blood. Two handspans of sternum, inches of belly, slivers of arm-meat all faded to nothing, as if the flesh had given up existing. Entropic wounds. The familiar [. . .] saw into the witch's

stomach, where hoops of gut ended where they met the hole, where the spine became hard to notice and did not exist for a space of several vertebrae. The man took off his trousers. His thighs were punctuated by the voids, his scrotum gone. ('F', p. 95, emphasis in original)

To put it otherwise, the familiar (now an eight-foot tall man-shaped thing, its flesh-components too many to itemise) employs xenosomatic degradation that subverts the familiar/witch dyad by enfeebling its maker, rather than fulfilling its *raison d'être*: augmenting his power by offering him 'a conduit to a fecundity' ('F', p. 83). Xenosomatic degradation has rendered the familiar a conduit to a self-applicable and endlessly beneficial fecundity, one that pays no heed to preternatural conventions. In the final analysis, the totality of the familiar's xenosomatic degradations carries subversive energy, for it allows the thing to surpass its intended servanthood, to achieve greater puissance than, and to physically thrive at the expense of, its witch-master.

Unlike those exercised by the familiar, the aforementioned specimen of xenosomatic degradation in *The Last Days of New Paris* arises from a union of Surrealist ideology and praxes, boasting a possibility-freighted essence owing to its tapping of the unconscious. Born in France in the early 1920s, Surrealism was an extensive artistic movement predicated on contesting received veins of thought to wed practical and intellectual experience.²⁹ Encompassing manifold adherents (e.g., architects, filmmakers, photographers, writers, artists), Surrealism's invariable teloi were to reconfigure the world and life.³⁰ Mel Gooding points out that Surrealist-employed genera of '[p]layful procedures and systematic stratagems provided keys to unlock the door to the unconscious and to release the verbal and visual poetry of collective creativity'.³¹ *Play tout court* is, in Roger Caillois's eyes, a voluntary, joyful diversion; its spatial and temporal limits are prearranged, yet its outcome is not; it does not call forth material or financial gain; it is marked by, and demands observance of, certain rules; it arouses in its participants a consciousness of its nature as an extraquotidian, make-

²⁹ Krzysztof Fijalkowski and Michael Richardson, 'Introduction', in *Surrealism: Key Concepts* (London: Routledge, 2016), ed. by Krzysztof Fijalkowski and Michael Richardson, pp. 1–16 (p. 1).

³⁰ Fijalkowski and Richardson, 'Introduction', p. 1.

³¹ Mel Gooding, 'Surrealist Games', in *A Book of Surrealist Games*, compiled by Alastair Brotchie, ed. by Alastair Brotchie and Mel Gooding, trans. by Alexis Lykiard and Jennifer Batchelor (Boston, MA: Shambhala, 1995), pp. 10–12 (p. 10).

believe reality.³² The Surrealists, Peter Stockwell observes, held that ‘phenomena [...] you perceive as pointedly co-incident, serendipitous, ironically juxtaposed or poignantly, comically or tragically accidental were in fact evidence of the *objective chance* by which you were seeing the genuine workings of the world untrammelled by your bourgeois rationalist delusions’.³³ Inaugurated and publicly circulated in the 1920s, the Exquisite Corpse (the *cadavre exquis*) was among the most eminent games of objective chance, its aim to elicit wonder via the remaking and revelation of new, fortuitous associations between word-images.³⁴ In the *dénouement* of Miéville’s novella, the Surrealism-inflected apparition of xenosomatic degradation to which I have alluded originates in an exquisite corpse: ‘[a] random totality, [its kaleidoscopic] components sutured by chance’.³⁵

The Last Days of New Paris unfolds in an alternate 1950s Paris that teems with reified Surrealist manifestations styled ‘manifs’: a product of an occult engine perforating the membrane between art and reality in 1941, when it was unwittingly rendered a warhead. Amid the ensuing bedlam, the Nazis invade and occupy Paris, their ranks bolstered by demons, the master of which Adolf Hitler himself has entered into a pact. With the assistance of infernal powers, the Nazis summon an en fleshed self-portrait fashioned by Hitler: a manif that wields the faculty to efface or transmute anything on which it lays its eyes, ‘bringing peace and prettiness, ending the [city’s war-born] rubble. Where there is discord, there it brings peace. Not even of death, but nihil’ (*LDNP*, p. 164). The protagonist of Miéville’s novella, Thibaut—a Parisian partisan, a Surrealism faithful—catapults the decapitated head of an exquisite-corpse manif into the air, after which it falls over that of the art-Führer ‘[[I]ike

³² Roger Caillois, *Man, Play and Games*, trans. by Meyer Barash (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2001), pp. 9–10.

³³ Peter Stockwell, ‘The Surrealist Experiments with Language’, in *The Routledge Companion to Experimental Literature*, ed. by Joe Bray, Alison Gibbons and Brian McHale (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2012), pp. 48–61 (p. 56, emphasis in original).

³⁴ Anne M. Kern, ‘From One Exquisite Corpse (in)to Another: Influences and Transformations of from Early to Late Surrealist Games’, in *The Exquisite Corpse: Chance and Collaboration in Surrealism’s Parlor Game*, ed. by Kanta Kochhar-Lindgren and others (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009), pp. 3–28 (p. 8).

³⁵ China Miéville, *The Last Days of New Paris* (London: Picador, 2016), p. 64. Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text. In an interview with Paul La Farge, Miéville discloses that *The Last Days of New Paris*, ‘was born out of an attempt to design a setting for a[n] [...] open-world video game’ in which character ‘“builds,” that is, circulating advice on how to construct the most powerful character’ would be subverted by the exquisite corpse: ‘each part of the exquisite corpse—which would be key to gameplay—would be randomly picked from among a very large number of possible bits and pieces—this system would be unhackable. There would be no “cheat mode”’ (Paul La Farge, ‘Interview: China Miéville’, *Bomb*, 15 December 2016 <<https://bombmagazine.org/articles/2016/12/15/china-mi%C3%A9ville/>> [accessed 20 October 2025]).

a carnival costume' (*LDNP*, p. 165). The mask-wearing Hitler manif hereafter finds itself transmogrified according to xenosomatic degradation inflected by the Surrealist notion of objective chance.

This phenomenon finds expression in a vivid passage:

The faceless manif of Adolf Hitler is randomizing. There is a fluttering, a cascade of options. As Thibaut watches a quick clicking circuit of alternative objects comes into place as the manif. Now its legs are not its legs, but a succession of other things, in random stutter. Its body, too. It is becoming a triple figure.

[...] [A]mong the parts that have started to make it up, to concatenate randomly, the flailing manif is no more defined by them than by the fruit, the bricks, the lizards, the windows and lavender and railway lines and endless other things that are suddenly, also, for instants, its components.

It is becoming exquisite corpse. It is remade. It is without artist. (*LDNP*, pp. 166–167).

The exquisite corpse channels the objective chance that constitutes its lifeblood into the art-Führer, exposing the latter to xenosomatic degradation insofar as 'its wan precision is replaced by that stochastic rigor, that self-dreamed dream' (*LDNP*, p. 166). Stated otherwise, it concomitantly destroys and regenerates the Hitler manif via a concatenation of losses and gains, deaths and micro-lives, unmakings and remakings. This affair, therefore, unveils xenosomatic degradation's power to retain its transformative fecundity *vis-à-vis* the body even in the absence of premeditation and deliberation. The Surrealist notion-cum-praxis of objective chance, it is manifest, augments the possibilities and applications of xenosomatic degradation.

Proceeding from the xenosomatic degradation at issue are two entwined corollaries that unfold to the advantage of Paris's partisan-inhabitants: the art-Führer's erasure from materiality and an end to its otherwise unstoppable prettification of Paris. By way illustration, the en fleshed self-portrait's demise is accompanied by the city's reversion to its authentic, war-torn state:

the buildings that it saw into twee perfection are less perfect again. Their colours bleed. They are too saturated, their lines are wrong again. They remember their cracks. And then with breaths of stone-dust they are back to ruination, or are not there, or are battered by age, scarred with the stuff of history, again. Paris is Paris.

There is a scream. A swallow. The light changes. The sun scuttles forward, eager to end this day. [...] The city is as it was. (*LDNP*, pp. 166–167)

The watercolour Hitler's defeat and Paris's accompanying renewal are notable since they capture two fashions in which xenosomatic degradation has enabled Surrealist play to transcend its ordinarily inconsequential transformative praxis. 'Much in the manner of the unconscious,' writes Susan Laxton, 'surrealist play activated paradoxical modes of thought and action that, while utterly without specific goals, were nevertheless able to modify reality—*just not usefully*'.³⁶ In Miéville's novella, however, Surrealist play is exceedingly useful, for it births the exquisite corpse and, thus, is indispensable to the xenosomatic degradation by which Hitler's en fleshed self-portrait is vanquished and Paris's fascist prettification is thwarted.

7. Xenosomatic Degradation across Space and Time

Given the argumentation set forth in the preceding pages, it is apparent that a carnivalistic spirit informs Miéville's speculative fiction on account of the destruction–regeneration dyad endogenous to the functionally varied xenosomatic degradations with which it bristles. The totality of xenosomatic degradation invoked for nourishment—i.e., that which is exercised by the Säcken, Saul, the she-anophelius and the slake-moths—unfolds to the advantage of its users. It enriches their lives. The slake-moth that gorges on the mindwaves emanating from Isaac's crisis engine complicates this paradigm: while the animal's feast is marked by a triumphant stomach-swelling, it is ultimately a gateway to its death. Lin's anti-theological and -patriarchal experimentation with pleasuresex, along with that apparition of free-and-whole fucking performed by Shekel and Angevine, are, meanwhile, scenarios that impart visibility to xenosomatic degradation's faculty for inducing marked psychological reconfigurations yoked to an eschewal of prejudice. In a divergent capacity, Tanner's supplementary-cum-ameliorative Remaking, and that juridical alternative from which the legendary Jack Half-a-Prayer springs, lay bare xenosomatic degradation's capacity to enable a reclamation of bodily latitude. Half-a-Prayer's Remaking eclipses Tanner's inasmuch as its immanent xenosomatic degradation affords him the oversized mantis claw that becomes synonymous with his misdeeds through which New Crobuzon's commonfolk experience a

³⁶ Susan Laxton, *Surrealism at Play* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019), pp. 1–2, emphasis in original.

vicarious rebellion evocative of Bakhtinian carnival (i.e., Half-a-Prayer's transgressions are a doorway to catharsis and an impediment to revolution). Elsewhere, the mutable London familiar banished by its witch-creator and the exquisite corpse born into a Nazi- and hellspawn-infested Paris render xenosomatic degradation a conduit to infinite reconfigurative possibilities bound up with the fate of other individuals (i.e., the exquisite corpse delivers the totality of Paris' inhabitants from the reified Führer-watercolour, while the familiar's growth coincides with its master's atrophy). Here, in fact, are antithetical scenarios. That is, whereas the exquisite corpse's killing of the Hitler manif preserves the lives of Paris's residents, the familiar's life-enrichment via assimilation of the sensuous world gradually kills the witch who conjured it. Lin's gland-art labour for Motley, although marking a fruitful reaffirmation of her unorthodox values and identity, is a peculiar specimen of xenosomatic degradation, for pleasure is here alien to the creative impulse that lies at its heart. The Absurd that performs the televised extraction of the biorigging-farmer's fanwing positions xenosomatic degradation as a beneficial political act with respect to itself and its mutilated comrades, for it triumphantly expresses its revolutionary anti-Terre stance while augmenting the Absurdian ranks. The xenosomatic degradations dissected in this chapter evoke a pattern: their carnivalistic destruction–regeneration dyad exploits and/or generates xenosomatic quiddities, hence enabling versatile forms of radical creativity with regard to material things and/or minds.

Conclusion

The present thesis has contended that there exists an interrelationship between Bakhtin's formulation of carnival and Miéville's speculative fiction. At bottom, it has demonstrated that Bakhtinian carnival inflects Miéville's fictional permutations of two phenomena: ab-carnivalism and xenosomatic degradation. By doing so, the thesis has addressed a scholarly lacuna—that is, the fashion in which Miéville's speculative fiction represents a peculiar specimen of what Bakhtin, in *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, designates carnivalised literature. For reasons that will now be set forth, the preceding chapters have both advanced and nuanced the thesis's contention.

1. Fragments of a Totality

By examining six ab-carnivalisms that each appear in a different Miéville fiction—*Iron Council*, *Perdido Street Station*, *Kraken*, ‘Tis the Season’, *Un Lun Dun* and *The Scar*—Chapter One has evinced ab-carnivalism's prominence in Miéville's oeuvre. Indeed, each of these ab-carnivalisms is instrumentalised by one of five anti-authority phenomena: puppet theatre, strike action, marching, revolt and mutiny. In *Iron Council*, ‘The Sad and Instructional Tale of Jack Half-a-Prayer’ exemplifies ab-carnivalism's capacity to render puppet theatre a medium for expressing insurrectionist dreams and originating a censorship-opposed audience–performer relationship. The vodyanoi dockers and their human comrades in *Perdido Street Station*, and the UMA familiars in *Kraken*, capture ab-carnivalism's faculty for dovetailing with strike action. This twofold interplay is unquestionably fruitful, for it engenders and structures intercommunal forms of anti-authority transgression on behalf of workplace justice. Nevertheless, ab-carnivalism is ultimately insufficient to materialising the amelioration sought by these strikers owing to authorities and their allies conspiring against them. The efficacy of ab-carnivalistic strike action hence proves to be circumscribed by the puissance of the authority figures to whom it offers resistance. The familiars-strikers in *Kraken* merit particular attention: while these magic-inflected entities fail to call forth ameliorative change, they impart visibility to ab-carnivalism's fruitful accommodation of citywide transgression. The legions of radical Christmasarians-marchers in ‘Tis the Season’

proclaim ab-carnivalism's synergy with public breaches of privatisation laws. The narrator-protagonist of this Miéville fiction is notable, for he experiences a nebulous-yet-weighty ideological shift by virtue of spectating the winter radicals' ab-carnivalistic deeds (i.e., their use of privatisation-flouting garments, singing, vandalism, and so on). The utterlings' revolt in *Un Lun Dun* and the Armadans' mutiny in *The Scar* are vivid exemplars of ab-carnivalism's ability to facilitate commonalty-effected depositions of oppressive rulers: Mr Speaker and the Lovers. The utterlings' triumph over Mr Speaker exhibits ab-carnivalism's ability to bestow unprecedented, albeit potentially fleeting, autonomy on its participants. Contrariwise, the Armadans' mutiny in *The Scar* illustrates ab-carnivalism's potential to yield a radicalism-conservatism dialectic: the pirate commonalty's toppling of the Lovers is ultimately a conservative act, re-establishing Armada's quest-disrupted piratical praxis. The identified correspondence between *parrhesia* and the fruitfulness of radical ab-carnivalism in *Un Lun Dun* and *The Scar* nuances the thesis's contention. Indeed, it exemplifies, by way of Deeba and Tanner, that *parrhesiastes* are susceptible to informing reifications of the transformative possibilities latent in ab-carnivalism.

At its core, the thesis's inaugural chapter has manifested three facts regarding the ab-carnivalism in Miéville's speculative fiction: i) it is a phenomenon-trope that reifies its participants' disdain for the established socio-hierarchical systems that marginalise and oppress them; ii) it accommodates disparate social groups and methods; and iii) it is not invariably a doorway to everyday amelioration.

Chapter Two dissects *Iron Council*, expanding on ab-carnivalism's radical potentialities, as identified in its predecessor's analyses of the utterling revolt and Armadan mutiny. It has demonstrated that the New Crobuzon Collective and the Iron Council boast renegopoleis that spring from, and are inflected by, ab-carnivalism. These renegade cities are predicated on impromptu acts of ab-carnivalistic opposition to the authority wielded by oppressive entities: the TRT's free-and-whole railroad workers, overseers and gendarmes; New Crobuzon's government and obedient Militia. The renegopoleis under discussion are marked by further commonalities—that is, ab-carnivalistic solidarity between free-and-whole, Remade, xenians and inhuman entities, as well as afflictions by prejudices traceable to the socio-hierarchical systems of prosaic life. Ab-carnivalism annihilates the lingering prejudices that beleaguer the Council's renegopolitan society, yet it only partly does so with regard to those of its districts-

and-barricades-comprised cousin: Bakhtinian-Miévillean festivity has remedial limits. The Collectivists' renegopolitan ab-carnivalism facilitates opposition to New Crobuzon's regime, yet it fails to cement the lasting sociopolitical change that they desired, for the Militia, in the end, have far greater numbers and resources. The Collectivists' defeat, along with the extirpation of their renegopolis, signals ab-carnivalism's ability to call forth a space of potential, rather than guaranteed, change.

The Iron Councillors' ab-carnivalism boasts greater remarkability than that of the Collectivists': it begets a successful revolution, paving the way for two decades of renegopolitan contentment. Judah's betrayal of his fellow Councillors by summoning a golem that extracts them from linear time problematises renegopolitan ab-carnivalism's effectiveness *vis-à-vis* revolution. Indeed, Judah deprives the trainsfolk of their democratically elected partaking in the revolution on which they have set their hearts irrespective of its uncertain outcome. Nevertheless, this affair is marked by traces of sanguinity that proceed from the Iron Councillors' ab-carnivalism having also been suspended with the train-renegopolis. Judah's treachery, in other words, supplies their ab-carnivalism with i) enduring import insofar as the Councillors and their ferrous renegopolis become loci of egalitarian relationships, of worship, hopes and dreams; and ii) an extratextual fecundity born of the Council's inevitable reanimation, as this event re-potentialises a triumphant revolution.

Chapter Two fundamentally divulges ab-carnivalism's power to operate as a conduit for the production of both renegopoleis and renegopolitan cultures, the duration of which are determined by (un)manageable and (un)favourable circumstances.

Chapter Three develops this thesis's contention via an analysis of how *Embassytown* is marked by an interplay between Bakhtin's notion of heteroglossia and carnivalism of the Bakhtinian and ab- sort. It exemplifies the fashions in which this triadic relationship brings forth world-altering disturbances to the familiar and putatively fixed workings of Language. The heteroglossic mendacity exercised by Surl Tesh-echer during Festivals of Lies and Spanish Dancer during its address to the oratees carry particular import both within and without the chapter: they materialise the possibility of 'private carnivalism'. That is, they bring to light the ab-carnivalism's frustration of circumscription by—and, therefore, slavish

relegation to—communal transgression. Surl Tesh-echer's commitment to radical ab-carnivalistic heteroglossia evinces ab-carnivalism's power to coincide with and subvert Bakhtinian carnivalism. *Embassytown* holds the most radical apparitions of ab-carnivalism among the speculative fictions that have been examined in the preceding chapters. Indeed, the novel positions ab-carnivalism as a doorway to irreversible transmutations of Ariekeene psycho-verbal compositions (this is manifested in the Absurd's gesticulative language and the metaphorisation by Spanish Dancer and its coterie). Ab-carnivalism's radical potential also finds expression in its contribution to the New–Absurd parley, for this recasts Ariekei–Terre relations *vis-à-vis* culture, society and politics. The fact that the Language crisis engendered by Bakhtinian carnivalism is ultimately terminated by ab-carnivalism evokes the necessity of a dialectic between both species of carnivalism in order to correct deleterious errors and oppression on the part of officialdom.

This thesis's third chapter, in short, illustrates a remarkable truth: an interplay between a Bakhtinian notion *tout court* and a Bakhtinian-Miévillean hybrid—between heteroglossia and ab-carnivalism, respectively—can materialise far-reaching, unprecedented change.

Chapter Four nuances the thesis's contention by showing how xenosomatic degradation's carnivalistic ambivalence—i.e., its destruction–regeneration system—can reconfigure the lives and worlds populated by Miéville's xenosomas (humanoid and inhuman bodies). This chapter establishes a measure of continuity with its predecessors' analyses of ab-carnivalism by demonstrating carnivalistic praxis's intersection with social tensions. The examples of this are numerous: Saul's triumph over London's 'conspiracy of architecture' is traceable to his ingestion of the decay-riddled burger unlocking his rat-mobility; an ingestion–excretion symbiosis informs the subversiveness of Lin's gland-art *vis-à-vis* other khepri women, subjecting her to a disquieting association with the reprobate Motley; the slake-moths' *de facto* reign over New Crobuzon springs from an interplay between nightmare-fuelled ingestion and excretion; the Aburdian leader's televised mutilation of the farmhand's fanwing publicises its scorn for god-drugs; Tanner's Remaking in Armada subverts New Crobuzoner jurisprudence, empowering him; the ever-mutable familiar inverts the prearranged power dynamic between itself and its master via knowledge-birthing assimilations of the sensuous world; the exquisite corpse's suffusion of the Hitler manif with objective-chance energy frustrates the Nazi's endeavour to remake Paris. In Miéville's speculative fiction,

xenosomatic degradation's ambivalent carnivalistic workings collectively serve as an instrument for versatile modes of radical creativity applicable to its users' identities and their relations to social and political paradigms.

Above all, Chapter Four has unveiled how Miéville employs the fantastic aesthetic to repotentialise the transformative utilities of the carnivalistic degradation that Bakhtin ascribes to the literary mode grotesque realism.

2. Venturing Beyond Miéville

This thesis has conjured several avenues for future scholarship.

Owing to ab-carnivalism's specific-yet-versatile schema (i.e., unlicensed communal transgressions that resist authority and may serve to engender lasting change), it is a phenomenon that doubtless transpires in speculative fictions beyond Miéville's oeuvre. Given their disposition to depict high–low dialectics predicated on unsanctioned transgressions, the speculative fictions of authors such as Michael Moorcock, M. John Harrison, Ursula K. Le Guin, Andrzej Sapkowski and George R. R. Martin are feasible candidates for ab-carnivalistic analyses.

A protest-based apparition of ab-carnivalism materialises, for example, in *A Clash of Kings* (1998): the second volume of Martin's ongoing fantasy series *A Song of Ice and Fire*. The ab-carnivalism at issue unfolds in King's Landing: the capital city of the Seven Kingdoms that comprise the continent Westeros. Thousands of the city's starving residents accost the boy-king of the Seven Kingdoms, Joffrey Lannister; his principal advisor and dwarf-uncle, Tyrion; and his mother, the incestuous queen regent:

A rolling thunder of rage and fear and hatred [...] engulfed them from all sides. 'Bastard!' someone screamed at Joffrey. 'Bastard monster.' Other voices flung calls of 'Whore' and 'Brotherfucker' at the queen, while Tyrion was pelted with shouts of 'Freak' and 'Halfman'. Mixed in with the abuse, he [Tyrion] heard a few cries of 'Justice' and 'Robb, King Robb, the Young Wolf,' of 'Stannis!' and even 'Renly!' From both sides of the street, the crowd surged against the spearshafts while the gold cloaks [the royal guard] struggled to hold the line. Stones and dung and fouler things whistled

overhead. ‘*Feed us!*’ a woman shrieked. ‘*Bread!*’ boomed a man behind her. ‘*We want bread, bastard!*’ In a heartbeat, a thousand voices took up the chant.¹

This passage is laden with ab-carnivalistic eccentricities: the abuse and objects hurled at Joffrey, Tyrion and the queen regent; the shouted assertions of support for rival personages—that is, Robb Stark (the King in the North) and the hostile brothers-claimants to Joffrey’s throne, Stannis and Renly Baratheon; the demands for bread, the interrelated chanting. In other words, each of these acts qualifies as an ab-carnivalistic eccentricity because it is unauthorised and boasts an anti-government character. The public’s chanting is an exhibition of reformatory ab-carnivalistic familiarity: it is an official protest-collaboration oriented toward everyday amelioration. Insofar as King Joffrey, Tyrion and the queen regent retreat from the encroaching, now-violent rabble (they spur their horses through and beyond them) despite their legitimate authority, they undergo an ab-carnivalistic decrowning. The mob, in turn, secure for themselves an ab-carnivalistic crowning. It is fleeting, enduring only until the now-shaken royals enter the Red Keep: the principal fortress of, and seat of power for, the king and queen regent. The tension-freighted scenario that Martin limns is a compelling indication of ab-carnivalism’s power to transcend Miéville’s prose.

I would suggest that a promising method of scholarly criticism is mapping private ab-carnivalism onto other speculative fictions both within and without Miéville’s oeuvre.²

An arresting instance of private ab-carnivalism finds expression in Norman Spinrad’s eroticism-charged SF novel *The Void Captain’s Tale* (1983). Here, Void Pilots are women-cyborgs who voluntarily experience machine-induced styles of quasi-religious orgasm to operate as the indispensable psycho-fleshly modules of star drives. Absent a Pilot, a vessel’s capacity for spacefaring is lost. Although Pilots are regarded as officers of the ship’s crew and possess corresponding privileges, they are inexorably *personae non gratae* among non-cyborged humans. Private ab-carnivalism is invoked by Dominique Alia Wu: the Pilot of the ship captained by the novel’s protagonist, Genro Kane Gupta. Having recently had sexual intercourse with Dominique, Genro learns that she has encroached on a fete hosted by his

¹ George R. R. Martin, *A Clash of Kings* (London: Voyager, 2014), p. 537, emphasis in original.

² An earlier iteration of this thesis chapter devoted to private ab-carnivalism in *Railsea* and now-undiscussed fragments of *King Rat*, *Perdido Street Station*, *Iron Council* and *Kraken*. Its omission sprang from my decision to maintain a thematic focus on communal transgression throughout the thesis’s ab-carnivalism-centric chapters.

vessel's Honoured Passengers (affluent travellers). To the would-be merry-makers' chagrin, the Pilot 'attempt[s] to engage [...] in discourse [with them] and refuse[s] to leave on her rights as an officer of the ship'.³ Dominique, in an unapproved manner, breaches the taboo of Void Pilot–Honoured Passenger mingling that stems from both a 'long tradition' and the 'chronic physical enfeeblement' (*VCT*, p. 16) of the cyborg caste to which she belongs. As such, Dominique avails herself of ab-carnivalistic eccentricity. The facticity of her wilful and equally unapproved intrusion on the fete hosted by the Honoured Passengers signals her production of an ab-carnivalistic *mésalliance*. Having been asked to resolve the matter, Genro attends the interrupted fete, only for the wayward Void Pilot to publicise her sexual relationship with him:

she spoke to me as if no other beings of consequence were there.

'Where have you been, mannlein?' she said from on high. 'As you can see, when I missed your company, I thought enough of the lack to seek you here, in the tropical fish tank. No higher proof of my regard for you is needful, nicht wahr?'

'Dominique! *How could you?*'

Never in my life had I experienced a moment of public exposure of such enormity so cavalierly delivered as if from Olympic realms, such a total disregard for the social surround, such an act of psychic terrorism, such a sea of stunned faces, such a feeling of nude unwholesomeness as might only be remembered from primal childhood dreams of appearing pantsless in a crowd. (*VCT*, p. 218, emphasis in original)

Dominique's scandalous revelation fractures Genro's authority (this, the Void Pilot hopes, will compel him to accept her own belief in the triviality of social considerations), thus qualifying as an ab-carnivalistic eccentricity. This act is momentous, yielding lasting change; as Genro illustratively remarks to Dominique, 'you [have] destroy[ed] my career' (*VCT*, p. 222). Ab-carnivalism, *The Void Captain's Tale* shows, is a concept that originated in, but is ultimately not delimited by, Miéville's corpus: its fecundity is untrammelled.

Ab-carnivalism can also elucidate the carnivalistic essence of the literary genre with which Miéville is often associated: the New Weird. As Vint puts it, the New Weird is

a term which has recently been used to describe a mode of fantastic literature that exceeds the tired tropes and themes often associated with genre fantasy and endless sequels, and instead reinvigorates fantastic writing as a blend of science fiction,

³ Norman Spinrad, *The Void Captain's Tale* (London: Panther, 1984), p. 216. Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text.

Surrealism, fantasy, magical realism, and Lovecraftian horror that is attentive to both its pulp and its high culture influences and roots.⁴

As exemplars of the New Weird, the novels that comprise Miéville's Bas-Lag trilogy—*Perdido Street Station*, *The Scar* and *Iron Council*—are ab-carnivalistic insofar as they proceed from an unsanctioned dissolution of the distinctions between assorted fantastic genres, and between pulp and high-culture influences. An investigation into the implications of this hypothetical contention may well inspire a productive re-evaluation of the literary and cultural affordances of the fantastic aesthetic.

As with ab-carnivalism, xenosomatic degradation is a Miéville conception that can productively be deployed on behalf of future scholarly research. Indeed, it can, no doubt, be applied to any speculative fiction, thereby exposing the ambivalent, post-Bakhtinian—or post-grotesque-realism—carnivalistic aspects of xenosomatic phenomena that exceed the limits of Miéville's corpus. That is, it accommodates manifold xenosomatic analyses because it disavows grotesque realism's positioning of the lower bodily stratum as the exclusive nexus of a carnivalistic destruction–regeneration dyad and can spawn lasting material and/or abstract change.

An uncomplicated, albeit vivid, specimen of xenosomatic degradation divorced from Miéville's works is effected by the chest-bursters featured in the *Alien* series. These entities are vermicular endoparasitoids that, as their name portends, erupt from the chest cavity of the species-divergent lifeform in which they have gestated. This chest-fracturing reflects xenosomatic degradation's destructive pole by virtue of rupturing the host-lifeform's bodily totality and, above all, ushering in their demise. In a simultaneous fashion, the creature is born, thus initiating its transmutation into a xenomorph: an endopredator that boasts an immense, sable frame and dyadic maws. Here, to put it differently, is the regenerative facet of xenosomatic degradation. The chest-burster's passage into the world lays bare xenosomatic degradation's susceptibility to venturing beyond the literary, Miévillean realm in which I contend that it originated.

⁴ Sherryl Vint, 'Introduction: Special Issue on China Miéville', *Extrapolation*, 50 (2009), 197–199 (p. 197).

The parasitic, mutable Necromorphs that serve as the player's core adversaries in the SF video game series *Dead Space* are further exemplars of xenosomatic degradation. Necromorphs are re-animated human corpses traceable to the metamorphic effects of a recombinant virus disseminated by extraterrestrial artifacts known as Markers. Having been exposed to this virus, human corpses undergo a swift and highly volatile succession of internal and external bodily reconfigurations that propel them into a nightmarish state of inhumanity: many shed flesh-parts, growing serrated, tentacular appendages and/or tumorous growths according to indefinite parameters. This process of inhumanisation betokens xenosomatic degradation's destructive and regenerative capabilities by ushering in the end of a human corpse's anatomy while generating a re-animated, monstrous alternative able to withstand varying degrees of dismemberment. The Necromorphs gesture toward the deleterious life-giving potentialities endogenous to xenosomatic degradation by virtue of its carnivalistic destruction–regeneration.

I have posited two specimens of xenosomatic degradation that reside beyond the purview of Miéville's speculative fiction. There are many others that have yet to be dissected, each of them crying out for acknowledgement.

3. Assertions of Finality

Ab-carnivalism and xenosomatic degradation cast a light on Miéville's fiction-centric engagement with carnivalistic folk culture's literature-shaping heritage, as formulated by Bakhtin in *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* and *Rabelais and His World*. Ab-carnivalism's unlicensed and often radical nature springs from Miéville's self-avowed commitment to producing anti-consolatory and -Tolkienian speculative fiction. By participating in and/or amplifying mundane socio-hierarchical tensions, it evades reducibility to its Bakhtinian harbinger's function as a utopian species of consolation predicated on sanctioned and, thus, faux transgression. It is thus far removed from the detextualised Tolkienian fantasy that, as noted in the Introduction, is bespoke by Bakhtinian carnival. Xenosomatic degradation's carnivalistically ambivalent mechanisms enable Miéville's xenosomas to transmute sensuous and abstract things in often advantageous manners. Given that the involvement of a community is not a prerequisite for its occurrence, xenosomatic degradation immanently holds greater spatiotemporal flexibility than carnivalism of both the Bakhtinian and ab-

variety. Irrespective of their differences, ab-carnivalism and xenosomatic degradation are staunch allies, for they bespeak a mutual commitment to unsettling the entrenched order of things.

The carnivalisation of literature, Bakhtin posits, yields many rewards:

Carnivalization is not an external and immobile schema which is imposed upon ready-made content; it is, rather, an extraordinarily flexible form of artistic visualization, a peculiar sort of heuristic principle making possible the discovery of new and as yet unseen things. By relativizing all that was externally stable, set and ready-made, carnivalization with its pathos of change and renewal permitted Dostoevsky to penetrate into the deepest layers of man and human relationships. It proved remarkably productive as a means for capturing in art the developing relationships under capitalism, at a time when previous forms of life, moral principles and beliefs were being turned into 'rotten cords' and the previously concealed, ambivalent, and unfinalized nature of man and human *thought* was being nakedly exposed. (*PDP*, pp. 166–167, emphasis in original)

In accordance with Bakhtin's paradigm, Miéville's carnivalised speculative fiction is a type of revelatory heuristic principle owing to ab-carnivalism and xenosomatic degradation. At their heart, these distinct-yet-symbiotic species of Bakhtinian-Miévillean phenomena unveil the means by which the narratives in Miéville's speculative fiction create radical variants of the paradigms that Bakhtin attributes to carnival and grotesque realism. Ab-carnivalism and xenosomatic degradation have laid bare the fact that Bakhtin's carnivalistic thought is amenable to evolution via non-mimetic strains of creativity.

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